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CREATOR AL LOWE REVEALS ALL OF LARRY'S DIRTIEST LITTLE SECRETS

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RARE'S MASTERCLASS IN FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS IS REMEMBERED

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INDUSTRY VETERANS JOHN AND STE FONDLY REMEMBER THEIR FAVOURITE RETRO GAMES

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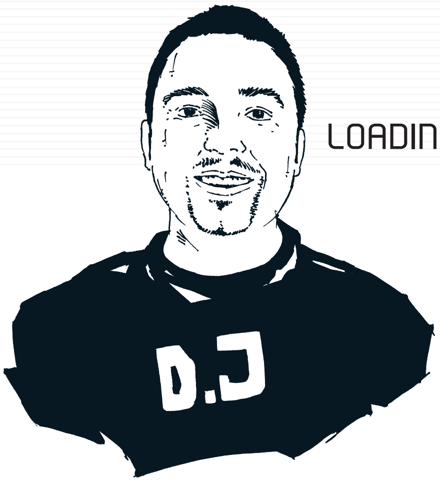
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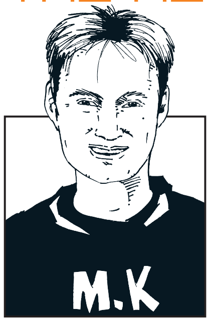
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eMag



THE RETROBATES

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK...



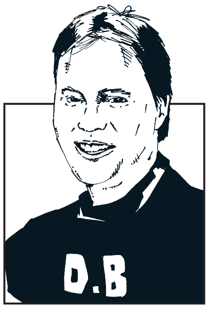
MARK KENDRICK

What comes around… It's been 20 years since I first worked on the legendary *Crash* and *Zap!64* and it's a privilege to be working with enthusiasts who still have that special passion for classic gaming.

Expertise: C64, Amiga, SNES, N64, Dreamcast, Mega Drive

Currently playing: Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith

Favourite game of all time: Atic Atac



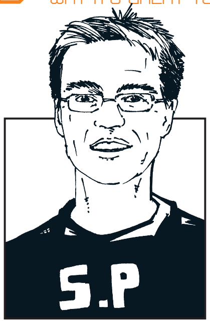
DAMIAN BUTT

Retro Gamer has a proud heritage and a passionate community of devotees, and I'm glad to be able to secure its future. It also means I can write about *Elite* a lot.

Expertise: Acorn Electron, Spectrum 48k, C64, SNES, Mega Drive, PlayStation, PC

Currently playing: Rollercoaster, Star Wars Battlefront II

Favourite game of all time: Elite



SIMON PHILLIPS

Mmmmm, *Retro Gamer*. The very idea that it's back is an absolute joy because I feel that in industry that is so forward-looking it is vital that we celebrate all the greatness of the past.

Expertise: Fertility, SNES, NES, Dreamcast, N64, Game Boy

Currently playing: Mario Kart DS, Perfect Dark Zero

Favourite game of all time: Head Over Heels



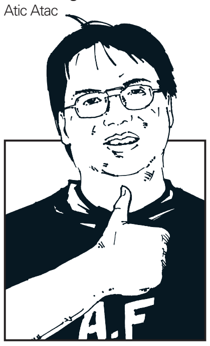
ASHLEY DAY

Thank God it's back – I now have an outlet for my Team 17 knowledge! They are so much better than Teams 1 through 16!

Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's Shining Force series

Currently playing: Sam & Max Hit the Road

Favourite game of all time: Shining Force III



ANDREW FISHER

Retro Gamer taught me about machines and games that I was not familiar with in the first 18 issues, and I look forward to sharing my knowledge with readers in the future.

Expertise: 20 glorious years with the Commodore 64

Currently playing: Metroid Zero Mission on Game Boy Advance

Favourite game of all time: Wizball



DAVID CROOKES

This has got to be one of the most hotly-anticipated magazine relaunches this decade – and rightly so. Expert writers and a community feel among readers make this mag very special.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC

Currently playing: Dizzy

Favourite game of all time: Broken Sword



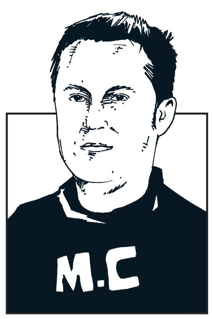
JON SZCZEPANIAK

Retro Gamer's rise from the 'gwave' proves that there is genuine value in gaming history, and that videogames are more than mere corporate products.

Expertise: Japanese consoles

Currently playing: Tons of monochrome Game Boy games

Favourite game of all time: Star Control 2



MARTYN CARROLL

I'm chuffed that *Retro Gamer* will survive and I trust that you'll turn it into the magazine I always hoped it would be.

Expertise: All things Z80

Currently playing: Soul Calibur III

Favourite game of all time: Jet Set Willy



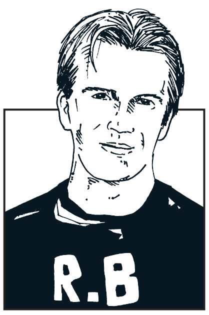
PAUL DURY

It's important to have a magazine that celebrates videogaming's rich heritage. Dreamy nostalgia, and hidden treasures... plus my kids need new shoes.

Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits

Currently playing: Lifeboat (Game & Watch)

Favourite game of all time: Sheep in Space



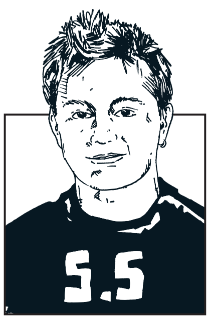
RICHARD BURTON

I'm glad to see *RG* back again, it's like meeting a long lost mate for a beer.

Expertise: Spectrum, Amstrad, anything Manic Miner or Jet Set Willy related

Currently playing: Super Mario Kart

Favourite game of all time: Manic Miner



SPANNER

I want *Your Sinclair* to come back, which it did thanks to *Retro Gamer*. Now *RG* has returned, my hopes of occasionally seeing the word 'wibble' have been once again restored.

Expertise: I just play the games

Currently playing: Taito Legends

Favourite game of all time: Double Dragon



SHAUN BEBBINGTON

I have some really fond memories of working on the mag as it was my first professional 'journalistic' job. Welcome back *RG*, we've missed ya mate!

Expertise: Commodore 64 and other 8-bit computers

Currently playing: The Legend of Zelda (NES classic on the GBA)

Favourite game of all time: Turrican

LOADING...

Well, it's certainly not been an easy journey, but *Retro Gamer* is finally back where it belongs; bigger and better than ever, with a new team, a new company, but the same passion and dedication to the retro gaming scene

Hopefully, you'll have noticed that the monthly coverdisc is now a thing of the past, and with any luck you'll be pleased to see that the magazine itself is a whole pound cheaper. Then of course you'll realise that everything looks… well… that little bit nicer than before. But don't worry. Just because we've made a few cosmetic changes, we haven't forgotten what made the magazine so enjoyable to read in the first place. A quick look at the fine fellows on this page will confirm that all the regular writers are present and correct, and we've even persuaded ex-editor Martyn Carroll to help out. You can read his excellent Spectrum piece starting on page 40.

Here at *Retro Gamer* we're absolutely committed to the retro cause and want to give you, the reader, a lavish publication that you'll be proud to display on your coffee table. Whether you're looking for entertaining interviews (check out the first part of our Pickford Brothers Desert Island Disks on page 80) or just want in-depth retrospectives on classic games (this month it's *Dizzy, Super Metroid* and *Simon the Sorcerer*), then *Retro Gamer* has everything you'll ever need. Welcome back and enjoy the magazine.



Darran Jones





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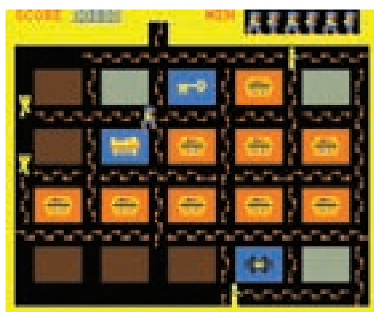
BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…









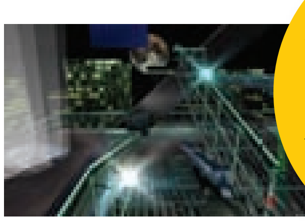
ESSENTIALS

SUPER METROID

THE CLASSIC GAME



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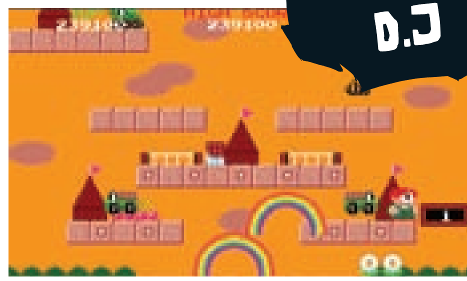
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RETRO RATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it







CLASSIC GAME

SIMON THE SORCERER



DEVELOPERS

MAGNETIC FIELDS



DESERT ISLAND DISKS

THE PICKFORD BROTHERS

RETRO SCENE





THE BITMAP BROTHER'S SUPERB CHAOS ENGINE ARRIVES ON MOBILE PHONES

MOBILE CHAOS

As mobile phones become increasingly advanced, more and more classic games are getting ported across to them. One such title is the recently released *The Chaos Engine*, a handheld version of the excellent Bitmap Brothers' shooter from 1993. We spoke to Chris White, Glu Mobile's Head of Game Development to find out a little bit more about this exciting- ooking conversion.

Retro Gamer: Why choose to port *The Chaos Engine* to mobile phones?
Chris White: Everyone on the team has been huge fan of *The Chaos Engine* since it first appeared on the Amiga back in 1993, so we were all very excited to make the mobile version. It's one of those titles that became a must-have for Amiga owners, and we thought it was time to give it a new lease of life. The Bitmap Brothers not only made visionary games, but created coherent and consistent worlds. Despite the simple 2D graphics, *The Chaos Engine* and *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* (which Glu has also recently ported to mobile phone) are highly absorbing games which are just incredibly fun to play.

RG: How much input have the Bitmap brothers had?
CW: Our main point of contact for these titles was Mike Montgomery, one half of the original Bitmap Brothers. Mike is already familiar with mobile gaming through some other projects he has been involved with, so he understood what it was we were looking to achieve with these conversions. His main contribution was making sure the look and feel of the games was true to the originals; he left the development side of the project very much up to us. Hopefully he's as happy with the results as we are.

RG: Any plans to release any more of their titles?
CW: It's too early to say whether or not we will look to do more mobile conversions of Bitmap titles. It's been a great experience developing the games and we very much hope that a new generation of gamers will enjoy playing these classic titles. If they prove to be as big a success as we expect, we could look at working with Mike again.

RG: Have you added any improvements over the original Amiga game?
CW: We didn't make any improvements – we felt it was really important to recreate the look and feel of the classic game. We didn't want to disappoint fans of the original by removing important features, killing the gameplay, or changing the way it works. It's a tricky task to ensure that the gamers are satisfied with the mobile version of such a classic, as any significant changes risk alienating fans of the original. Having said that, we did redesign the maps of *The Chaos Engine* rather than convert them, simply to ensure they were suitable for mobile play.

RG: *The Chaos Engine* appeared on a variety of machines, why did you choose the Amiga version to port?
CW: The core gameplay dynamics of classic Amiga retro games like *The Chaos Engine* translate really well to mobile. The Amiga joystick only had one fire button, which means the games have simpler controls than many of the consoles, which followed it. It was also designed to offer players an instant gaming fix, with a relatively small learning curve compared with many modern titles, and this is why the Amiga version is so perfect for mobiles.

Chaos Engine is available now from http://www.glu.com/games/action/chaos_

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…



» The original *Sega Rally Championship* is regarded as one of the all-time great racing games – and it's coming to the PS2

NEW SEGA RALLY TITLE TO INCLUDE PAST HIT



HIDDEN TREASURE

For many, the original *Sega Rally Championship* (and in particular, the outstanding Saturn conversion) is regarded as one of the greatest racers of all time, thanks to its wonderfully tight controls and challenging level design. Indeed, we constantly find ourselves going back to it, if only to attempt to finally master the amazing time attack mode.

Luckily for us then, Sega, obviously filled with the spirit of Christmas has recently announced that its new PS2 racer, *Sega Rally 2006*, will not only be available on 16 January (Japan only at the moment), but will also feature *Sega Rally Championship* in all its original glory. That's right, we're finally going to be getting an arcade perfect conversion (or so Sega promises) of one of the greatest racers ever made. Let's just hope that Sega doesn't keep us waiting too long.

REVOLUTION REMAKES?

NINTENDO REVEALS THE POSSIBILITY OF UPDATED RETRO CLASSICS



» *Jet Force Gemini* could seriously benefit from a Revolution makeover



One of the most important aspects of Nintendo's new Revolution (at least from our point of view) is the incredible back catalogue of games that we're going to have access to. Sure, we're more than happy to play around with that new controller and *Mario 128*, but we'd be lying if were said we weren't looking forward to the likes of *Lylat Wars*, *Super Mario Bros 3* and *The Ocarina of Time*. And interestingly, it's quite possible that they could be better than ever…

Now nothing has been confirmed yet, Nintendo has intimated that it's thinking about updating certain games with hi-res visuals and an improved frame-rate. While we're not too concerned with Nintendo tinkering with its 8 and 16-bit titles, it could potentially make a massive difference to its N64 catalogue. Rare's games in particular are particular offenders (mainly because they were pushing the N64 hardware so much) and if Nintendo can get the likes of *Perfect Dark* and *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* running at a silky 60FPS, we'll be the first in the download queue. Hell, we wouldn't even mind paying for them all over again…

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH



EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL TAKE A LOOK AT ONE OF ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES. THIS MONTH IT'S DAMIEN MCFERRAN'S LOVE LETTER TO THE WONDERFUL MAGAZINE, MEAN MACHINES.

***Mean Machines* initially started off life as a small section of Computer & Video Games and was dedicated to covering the slowly growing console scene.** As the industry grew, *Mean Machines* became its own magazine and was spearheaded by ex-Zzap!64 editor, Julian Rignall. Featuring honest reviews, cute cartoon replicas of each staff member and an important link to the world of importing, *Mean Machines* was quite simply one of the greatest console mags ever created. Sadly, after 24 issues *Mean Machines* was split into two publications so that it could report on the massive 16-bit console boon. While *Mean Machines Sega* contained much of the original *Mean Machines* style, its Nintendo counterpart, the *Official Nintendo Magazine* was greatly sanitised and lacked much of the magic that made Mean Machines so enjoyable to read.
Damien's website is a real labour of love and features exclusive interviews with all of the magazines most important staff members (including Julian Rignall and Rich Leadbetter), plenty of old reviews to read through and scans of every magazine cover. Head on over to **http://www.meanmachines.info/** and get all misty-eyed. We did.

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO.1: THE SENTINEL



Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* is still deemed by many as one of the greatest strategy games ever created. Not content with its suitably eerie box art, Firebird also ensured that Bob Stevenson's loading screen perfectly captured the abstract uniqueness of the game itself.

ARCADE SHOW



ONE OF SEGA'S MOST BELOVED HITS FINALLY RETURNS TO ARCADES

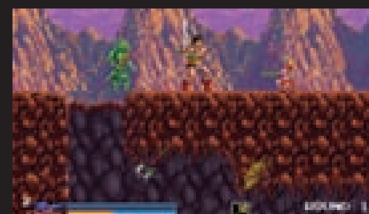
GET READY!

Sega's recent arcade show revealed all manner of tasty-looking games that are due to debut on its technically proficient Lindberg hardware. While the likes of *Virtua Fighter V*, *Virtua Tennis 3* and *House of the Dead 4* have been pretty well documented, it was the stunning update of *Afterburner* that impressed the most.

Suitably subtitled *Climax*, it looks incredible, features breath-takingly fast visuals, amazingly detailed planes and the sort of fantastic blue sky that will have UK Resistance wetting itself with joy. Like the recently released *OutRun 2*, *Afterburner Climax* is already looking like a wonderful return to the old school play mechanics that made the original 1987 arcade hit such a joy to play, and we'll be the first lining up in the queue to play it when it eventually gets a UK release.



» ***Final Fight*** **is one of Capcom's most influential beat-'em-ups of all time and now you can play it on your PSP. Great Stuff**





» Portable Rainbow Islands? Yes please!

CAPCOM, TAITO AND KONAMI ANNOUNCE BRAND NEW COMPILATIONS FOR SONY'S PSP

RETRO GOES PORTABLE

If you've been flicking through the Retro Rated section of this month's issue, you'll have already noticed that we've been particularly impressed with the recent *Capcom Classics* and *Taito Legends* compilations. Well, it would appear that the festive good cheer is set to continue as Capcom, Taito and Konami all have new compilations arriving on the PSP in the first quarter of 2006. The most exciting compilation is Capcom's, mainly because it features the outstanding *Strider*. But that's not all, in addition to the 22 games that have already appeared on the PS2 and Xbox versions, it would appear that Capcom is also including *Side Arms – Hyper Dyne, 1941: Counter Attack, Varth, Last Duel, Black Tiger, Magic Sword, Captain Commando, Rush 'N Crash, Quiz & Dragons, Midnight Warriors, Chariot* and *Block Block*. That's a stunning selection of games by anyone's standards and represents the cream of the Capcom crop.

The next PSP compilation is from Taito, and like Capcom, it's effectively dipping into its recently released Japanese compilations (which will be released in the UK as *Taito Legends II*). Bizarrely, *Bubble Bobble* hasn't actually made the cut, but the 20 titles that will be on offer include: *Rainbow Islands Extra, Rastan Saga, The New Zealand Story, Cameltry, Qix* and *Crazy Balloon*. Interestingly, Taito has taken a leaf out of Namco's books and will be including enhanced versions of *Crazy Balloon, Legend of Kage, Cameltry* and *Balloon Bomber*. Needless to say, all four updates will feature enhanced visuals and plenty of new gameplay tweaks.

The last compilation is Konami's, and while it contains the smallest amount of titles, it's likely to send shoot-'em-up fans into a rabid, mouth-foaming frenzy. Mainly due to it featuring five *Gradius* titles on one tiny UMD. Before you get too excited however, it's probably best that we point out that the fifth game isn't Treasure's utterly fantastic *Gradius V*, but is actually Konami's PlayStation title, *Gradius Gaiden*. However, this is still looking like a must-have title. All three have yet to receive UK release dates, but you'll be able to import them from Japan early next year.

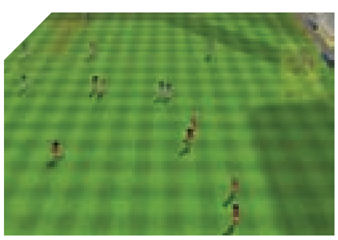
COMPILATION COOL



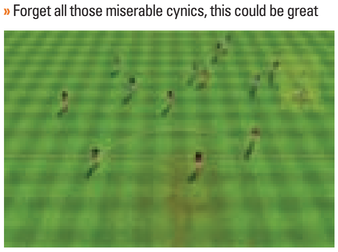
MORE RETRO HITS FROM EA

AT LAST!

It's been available in the US for absolutely ages now, but Electronic Arts has finally revealed that it will be bringing *Namco's Arcade 50th Anniversary* compilation will finally be appearing in the UK. Due on 10 February, it will include *Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Dig-Dug, Rolling Thunder* and several other classics. Systems supported will include the Game boy Advance, GameCube, PlayStation and Xbox.



» Forget all those miserable cynics, this could be great



COME ON YOU CODIES!

CODEMASTERS REVEALS A BRAND NEW SENSIBLE SOCCER GAME

Before Konami's stunning *Winning Eleven* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* franchises started ruling the pitch, it was Sensible Software's *Sensible World of Soccer* that was considered by many (especially Amiga owners) to be the must-have footy title. After what seems like an age, Codemasters has finally decided to release an all-new update of the legendary franchise and have persuaded original creator, Jon Hare to come back on board, and hopefully, lead the game to victory. "Following the success of *Sensible Soccer's* recent mobile edition and the fantastic retro Plug 'n' Play TV version of the game, it's great to bring a truly new version out for the first time in over eight years on all of the major formats," reveals Hare, who is now a director and games design consultant at Tower Studios. "We are doing everything in our power to modernise and recreate the sheer playability, fun and footballing depth of the original game and remind the playing public just what they have been missing out in the current market of slow, drab sims."

While we're pleased to see that the classic large heads of the original players have been retained, we're not too sure if cel-shaded players are the right way forward. Still, we're certainly not going to argue with the genius of Jon Hare.

eMag



AMERICA FREE RETRO★

YOUR US TAKE ON THE RETRO SCENE WITH RETRO GAMING RADIO'S SHANE MONROE



BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED

Fifty per cent of the retail business is done in a single month during the holiday season here in America. All year long we pay off credit cards we used last Christmas only to swipe the plastic again come December – and it's not uncommon to hear about folks racking up five figures worth of debt just so that they can celebrate the joys of the holidays. Isn't it worth it once a year for parents to hear those three little words that bring tears to their eyes? No, not "I Love You"; it's "Batteries Not Included."

If we're going to drop that kind of money into the holidays, the least we can do is ensure the people we love get gifts they *really* want. So this Christmas, Santa Shane has come up with some Christmas gift ideas for the retro gamers on your shopping list. Whether you're spending a little or a lot, Santa Shane will make sure you get only the best for the discriminating retro gamer on your list.

For the budget shoppers flooding the floors of Wal-Mart and Toys R Us, don't be sucked in by the $15 Plug 'N Play titles that promise five or six real arcade games. We retro folk remember every detail about *Frogger* and *Pac-Man*, and we'll know right away that these are nothing more than cheap forgeries. Instead, pick up the excellent Commodore 64 30-in1 DTV game unit. This is the only true emulated TV game unit out there and it brings back some of the greatest games from the 8-bit era including the Epyx Games series, *Uridium, Gateway to Apshai, Impossible Mission, Paradroid* and more – all pixel perfect. This great toy won't break the bank either; Kay-Be-Toys sells them for $14.95 (don't forget the batteries!).

Rarely do we see 'classic game' collections for PC or game consoles that really do justice to their origins. Normally they are packed with the same games we've seen available over and over – never perfect to the originals. This year we've got *Taito Legends*, an utterly superb compilation featuring 29 great and obscure Taito titles such as *Rastan, Zookeeper, Volfied, Elevator Action, Operation Wolf, Space Invaders* and many other titles that have never appeared in previous collections (at least in the US). I salute them for taking a chance with non-mainstream titles. At $19.95, I recommend picking up the PC version where the emulation is absolutely spot on.

Sometimes gifts aren't about what you get; it's about how much you spend. For those looking for a pricier-but-still-retro gift, here are a couple of more generous items for the good little boys and girls on your list.

Portable retro gaming has proven almost futile for anyone with a budget. If you don't want to spend $600 on a handheld, your choices are inherently limited to classic gaming offerings on popular handhelds like the Nintendo GBA/DS (such as the recent rash of decent classic gaming 'two-packs' from DSI Games including *Gauntlet/Rampart*) or Sony PSP (like *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play*). For emulation lovers out there, the GamePark32 (aka GP32) offered a quality emulation unit at a great price with none of the strings attached. This year, we are graced with the GP32's big brother, the GP2X (http://www.gp2x.co.uk), which promises us upper-crust emulation like C64, Amiga, and even the popular Neo Geo arcade games. With great features like video/audio playback (no special formats required), TV-Out, a bright crisp screen, and the system running on the popular Linux





SHANE MONROE IS THE OWNER OF POPULAR INTERNET RADIO SHOW, RETRO GAMING RADIO. HEAD ON OVER TO HTTP://WWW.RETROGAMINGRADIO.COM IF YOU WANT TO CATCH HIS LATEST SHOW.

operating system – you might want to order one for yourself too. Available online only from various retailers, this unit will roughly set you back a measly $180 (don't forget the batteries!).

Need to prove your love through money? You're looking for the Ultracade Arcade Legends. For a cool $1999, you get a real arcade cabinet, monitor and controllers (including the coveted trackball), and 35 fully emulated games including *Berzerk, Centipede, Tempest, Asteroids* and *Missile Command*. You can add game packs to it from the manufacturer too. Best part is – you can actually buy it locally from most Costco warehouse stores. They actually have them in stock during the holidays and you can have it 'under the tree' (you might have to take the tree out) on Christmas morning.

There you have it folks, Santa Shane's picks to ensure a Happy New Year. Retro gaming has been the gift that keeps on giving for over thirty years… here is to another great year of gaming.

Keep it retro!
Shane

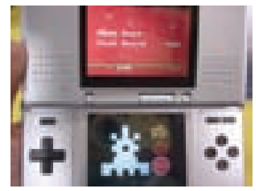
INTELLIVISION LIVES ON

NINTENDO'S DS GIVES CLASSIC INTELLIVISION GAMES A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Nintendo's DS may have only been around for a year, but it's already received its fair selection of retro compilations, or titles inspired by classic hits of yesteryear. Whilst we'll ignore the excruciatingly bad *Atari Retro Classics* (what were you thinking Atari?) we're definitely looking forward to *Intellivision Lives*, mainly because it's going to deliver a retro gaming experience that will make it totally unique to the console, and it's all thanks to the amazing use of the DS's second screen.

While *Intellivision Lives* has already appeared on the PS2 and PC, no system has been able to successfully emulate the Intellivision's unique control pad. Original Intellivision games came with plastic overlays and unique icons that quickly allowed the player to master the game's controls; add in the fact that the pads also came with a directional disc and it's hardly surprising that the machine is still extremely popular with collectors.

Thanks to the DS's touch-sensitive screen, Intellivision has been able to emulate the overlays of old and offer you an Intellivision experience that's currently impossible on any other machine. Due out early next year, *Intellivision Lives* will contain over 30 classic games, all perfectly emulated. While no publisher is currently attached to the project, we're confident that it's only a matter of time before a deal is actually announced.



» Thanks to the wonders of technology you can now have Intellivision hits in the palm of your hand. Take note Atari, this is how it's done…



» They don't make controllers like that anymore…

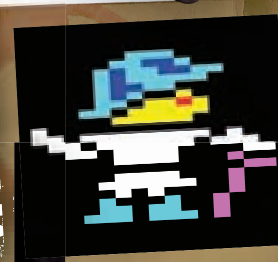


THE LEGEND LIVES ON

BRAND NEW TAITO COMPILATION ANNOUNCED FOR NEXT YEAR

After the recent success of the superb *Taito Legends*, we're overjoyed to hear that Xplosiv has a second compilation that due to appear in the first half of next year. The imaginatively named *Taito Legends II* will effectively contain all the games from the recent Japanese compilations Joukan and Gekan that didn't appear on the recent *Taito Legends* compendium. A total of 40 games will be included in the colossal collection, many of which have never been available to play in the UK before (unless of course you imported them). One of the biggest highlights is *Elevator Action Returns*, a wonderfully frantic sequel that was previously only available for the Sega Saturn (and even then it was confined to Japan). Considering it's currently selling on eBay for over £50, it's worth buying *Taito Legends II* for *Elevator Action Returns* alone. The 39 other games are just going to sweeten what already looks like an amazing bargain.

HERO OF THE MONTH



SABREMAN

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero. Our first entry is Rare's Sabreman, the oldest adventurer you're ever likely to meet.

First Appearance: Sabre Wulf

Distinguishing Features: Pith Helmut

Weapon of Choice: Sabre

Most likely to: Become addicted to the properties of strange flowers

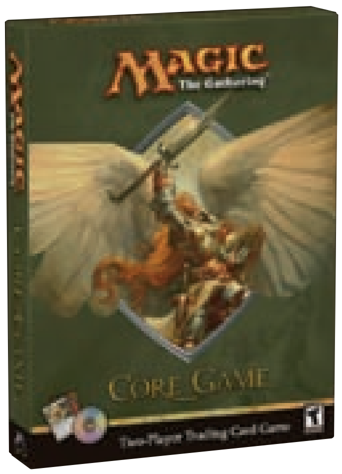
Least likely to: Ever appear in a commercial release of *Mire Mare*

Unusual fact: *Knight Lore* (Sabreman's third game) was actually completed before *Sabre Wulf*, but was delayed because the Stamper brothers felt it was too ambitious

COMPETITION

IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN AN INTRODUCTION INTO THE WORLD OF MAGIC THE GATHERING



If you're pretty skeptical about both trading card games and gothic mysticism, then you might be surprised to hear about a growing cult craze that combines the two. *Magic the Gathering* has a vast global following, with large and small-scale competitive tournaments taking place all over the Globe. This year's Pro-Tour, held in London gave away $350,000 to winning competitors of the game. All you need to get started is a core game starter set, which comes with a basic rulebook, a CD-ROM to walk you through the game, and two decks, and we have 25 to give away.

This will enable two players to play and learn the game together. If you still hanker after a good game of Top Trumps and you're so over the poker thing already, or if you know a 16 year old who has the secret moves cracked on every level of every PlayStation game to date, it might be time to get started on a whole new obsession that's taken the world by storm…

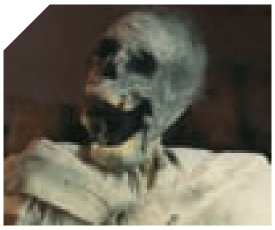
For your chance to win simply answer the following question

Name the location of a Magic: The Gathering Pro-Tour event in 2005.
a) Sydney b) London c) Helsinki

Please respond via email to: wizards@hasbro.co.uk with "Retro Gamer" competition as the email title
Or by snail mail to:
"Retro Gamer" competition
Wizards of the Coast
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OLD BALLS



WE'VE NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT RETRO BALL, HONEST

BALLS!

Chances are if you went to the recent Retro Ball event then you're probably wondering why we've not covered it in *Retro Gamer.* Don't worry, we haven't forgotten about it, it's just that deadlines being what they are, it's starting too late for us to cover it in the current issue.

Worry not though, as we've no intention on missing out on what's looking like one of the most exciting retro events of the year. We'll be bringing you a full report on everything that happened at the event next issue - providing of course that we don't spend all our spare time getting the Oliver Twins to sign our multiple copies of Dizzy…

AFTER 25 YEARS, PAC-MAN FINALLY FINDS HIS VOICE

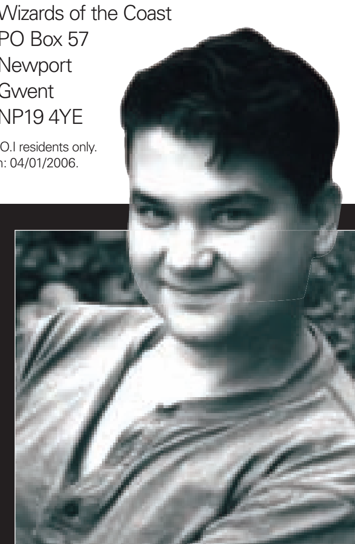
IT TALKS!



» He may have finally found his voice, but Pac-Man's also picked up plenty of new moves over the last 25 years

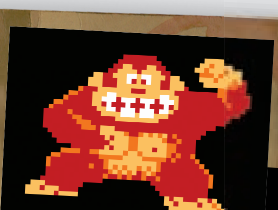
Considering the sheer amount of games he's appeared in over the years, it's amazing to think that Pac-Man has never actually spoken anything other than the obligatory 'wocka wocka'. All that's about to change though, as one of the world's most iconic videogame characters has finally been given the power of speech, courtesy of Outsource Media.

Okay, so we'll conveniently forget that he was already talking in that awful cartoon series and simply tell you that Martin T Sherman will be voicing him. The actor has already appeared in movies such as *Batman Begins* and *Gangs of New York*, but has found voicing Namco's beloved mascot a whole different experience. "I've been the voice of plenty of different characters in the past, but Pac-Man is without doubt the most fun and the most difficult," he tells us. "I mean, what is a yellow, ghost-eating circle supposed to sound like? Me, apparently! I had a great time recording this voice and can't wait to see how people will react to it."



Pac-Man World 3 has already been released in the US, but won't be available in the UK until the beginning of February. The wait will hopefully be worth it however, as the original 1980 hit will be included for everyone to enjoy.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



DONKEY KONG

You can't have heroes without villains (just ask the Beach boys) so we'll be featuring a mighty nemesis every issue. First up is Nintendo's barrel-flinging ape, Donkey Kong

First Appearance: Donkey Kong

Distinguishing Features: Um, he's a goddamned giant ape, although later games did see him wearing a red tie

Weapon of Choice: Barrels of course

Most likely to: Kidnap princesses and climb to the highest available building

Least likely to: Get the starring role in Peter Jackson's King Kong remake

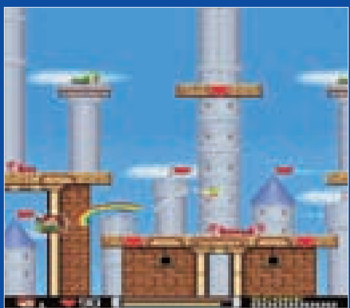
Unusual fact: Many believe that Donkey Kong appeared in *Super Mario Kart*, but it was actually his son, Donkey Kong Jr

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO HOST UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, DROP US A LINE AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because *Retro Gamer* looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing anything and everything that the passionate retrogaming fan needs to look out for…



DECEMBER '05

RAINBOW ISLANDS

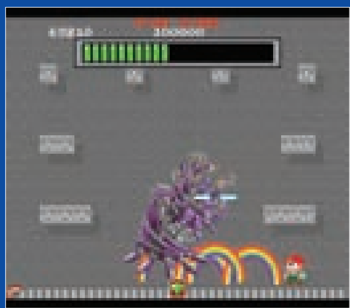
Released: 28 December (Japan)

Publisher: Rising Star Games

Price: 5,863

Format: Nintendo DS

Arriving just too late for Christmas is a DS re-imagining of *Rainbow Islands* from *Rising Star Games*. While we weren't too impressed with an early build of the game (it played a little too much like Yoshi! Touch and Go for our liking), RSG assures us that everything will be in place when it finally hits the UK. Perhaps the biggest disappointment though is that the original arcade hit won't be included in the finished game.



JANUARY '06

TAITO MEMORIES POCKET

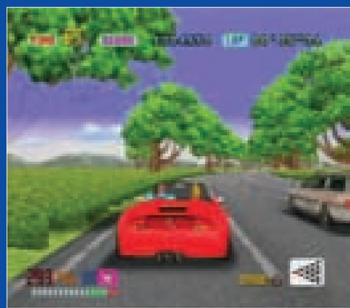
Released: 03 January (Japan)

Publisher: Taito

Price: 5,983 Yen

Format: PSP

Taito takes some of the best (and worst) games from its recent PS2 compilations and re-packages them for Sony's shiny new portable. Game's we're looking forward to playing on the move include Rainbow Islands Extra, The New Zealand Story, Rastan Saga and Elevator Action. Best of all though are the 2005 updates of several titles that will boast improved visuals and greatly enhanced gameplay elements.



JANUARY '06

SEGA CLASSICS COLLECTION

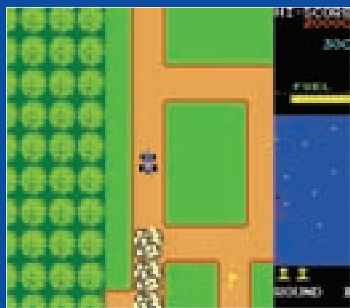
Released: 27 January

Publisher: Sega

Price: £19.99

Format: PlayStation2

Rather than feature perfect ports of past arcade hits, Sega has instead hired 3D Ages to update them for the PS2. While some titles are extremely ropey (Golden Axe should be avoided like the plague), the likes of *OutRun, Fantasy Zone, Bonanza Bros* and *Virtua Racing* are worth their weight in gold and retain all the playability of the original arcade games.



FEBRUARY '06

NAMCO ARCADE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

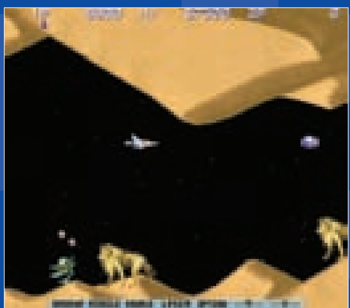
Released: 03 February

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £39.99

Format: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, GBA

Never ones to break with tradition, Namco has released yet another compilation that features plenty of past hits. *Pac-Man, Ms Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian* and *Rally-X* are just of few of the titles on offer, with further nostalgia provided by bands like the Fine Young Cannibals and Dexy's Midnight Runners. No, really…



FEBRUARY '06

GRADIUS PORTABLE

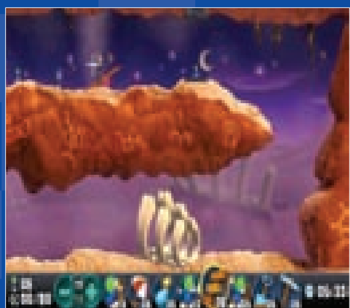
Released: 09 February (Japan)

Publisher: Konami

Price: 6,343 Yen

Format: PSP

It may not feature that many games (five to be precise) but *Gradius Portable* is already shaping up to be a shoot-'em-up fan's wet dream. It's unclear if Konami will be including any extra titles (a few *Salamander* or *Parodius* games would go down a treat) but this is still looking like a very exciting package.



FEBRUARY '06

LEMMINGS

Released: TPB

Publisher: Sony

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Yes, we know that *Lemmings* would be perfect on Nintendo's DS, but the IP is owned by Sony, so it's never going to happen. Luckily, this update is already looking mighty tasty, and features brilliantly sharp visuals, familiar level design and a decent control system. Roll on February…



MARCH '06

TAITO LEGENDS II

Released: TBC

Publisher: Xplosiv

Price: TBC

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC

This is it; this is the big one. After impressing us with the retro gaming goodness of *Taito Legends*, Xplosiv is now about to unleash one of the biggest retro collections we've ever seen. Over 40 classic hits will be included, many of which cost a fortune in their native Japan. A guaranteed hit.



MARCH '06

CAPCOM CLASSICS PSP

Released: TBC

Publisher: Capcom

Price: TBC

Format: PSP

If Capcom manages to include all the games from *Capcom Classics*, as well as hits such as *Strider, Black Tiger* and *Varth*, this could well be one of the greatest portable retro titles ever. A UK release date still hasn't been set yet, but as soon as we know more we'll let you know.





COMMENT

ATARI CREATES A STINK IN 1972

MUSINGS FROM THE MIND OF MACLEAN

Well, who'd have thunk it! *Retro Gamer* has risen, Phoenix-like from the ashes and wants me to write about everything and anything. I intend to cover a wide range of subjects in short and long articles, with topics including gaming memories from the Seventies and Eighties, to collecting digital LED watches (seriously), to articles on how to restore a 25-year old arcade machine so well that your wife won't mind it being in the sitting room. Well almost…

One thing I often ask gamers is: can they recall their very first captivating encounter with an arcade machine? Some don't remember, while others will happily tell you their life story in vivid detail. So to kick off, here's my own tale from the Bronze Age.

Back in 1972 (yup, the last century) Atari burst onto the scene creating a right stink with a machine that sold by the truckload, inspired dozens of rip-offs and founded the industry almost overnight. I might be showing my age here, but my first memory of a videogame machine was literally the grandfather of them all – *Pong*.

The occasion was a school coach trip to a seaside resort encrusted with seashells and people older than my Gran, and the usual selection of seedy arcades, mechanical games, fruit machines, and chip shops. After a couple of hours down on the beach with the teacher pointing at crabs in rock-pools (and making wisecracks that no one really understood at the time) we all headed back to the school bus.

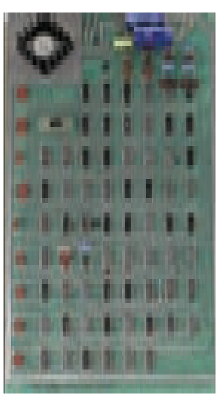
I tried my luck suggesting that the teacher should buy us 40 ice creams. Amazingly, he gave me a crisp fiver and asked me to go and get them. In order to reach the Mr Whippy van I decided to take a shortcut through a nearby arcade – big mistake. You see, I noticed this yellow-fronted machine surrounded by a sea of people. It had a couple of volume control knobs on it, and a bright square dot being batted back and forth on a black and white TV, and it had beeps coming out of it. Two different sci-fi beeps at that. But I just couldn't resist the lure of the dot and gravitated towards it. I changed the fiver into coins and plugged one in, thinking that no one would know any different because I'd soon be getting change from the ice cream bloke.

45 minutes and £4 quid later, the coach driver interrupted my trance-like state shouting that everyone was looking for me; worried I'd been kidnapped by aliens (I'll leave that story 'till later).

Once I'd snapped back to reality I found myself panicking and going bright red at the thought of having to explain how I'd spent all the money and had no ice creams to show for it – after all, £5 was a lot of cash back then. Various dubious fibs crossed my mind: beaten up and money stolen; it blew out my hand in the strong wind, sir; tripped over and dropped it, etc. Luckily the coach driver understood my predicament, and he bought what he could (which was about 20 ice creams) with us saying that Mr Whippy had run out of cones and that we had spent half hour looking for another one. Ahem.

Little did I know that literally 30 yrs later in 2002 I would own one of the last working *Pong* machines left on the planet, and that I would be lending it to the Barbican Museum in London for an exhibition of the origins of the global games industry – an industry that's now bigger than Hollywood!

Next Month: How my misspent youth skiving off school to play games in Tottenham Court Road led to me writing games. Or something…



» Yes, your eyes do not deceive you. This is an actual *Pong* arcade board – one of only a handful in existence

eMag





IN THE LAND DOWN UNDER



AS PART OF A REGULAR SERIES, RETRO GAMER AIMS TO CHRONICLE IMPORTANT GAMING PLACES AROUND THE GLOBE. THIS MONTH JOHN SZCZEPANIAK EXAMINES THE OUTBACK, COLD TINNIES AND MANY A SHEILA TO BRING YOU THIS SPECIAL REPORT FROM AUSTRALIA

Australia is an officially supported PAL region like the United Kingdom and the rest of Western Europe. With PAL territories being renowned for their dire marketing and a plague of other problems, expectations for Australian gaming would be understandably quite low. But as was revealed, Australia does occasionally have its spectacular moments.

The genesis of Australian gaming began much like the rest of the world, with early 'TV game' *Pong* clones and cartridge based machines that played generic games. These initial forays into consoles soon faded as the Atari 2600 took hold of the market.

Australia also started off in a similar fashion to their ex-colonial masters Britain, receiving the ZX80 and then ZX81 which became hugely popular in the early 1980s. A National ZX Club formed, which sent out a 16 page newsletter each month. This kept going for many years, and featured reader's programs, system modifications and all manner of other interesting articles. To highlight the past popularity of the machine, it can still be found easily at garage sales. Surprisingly, the Spectrum never took off, likely due to the arrival of other home computers in later years.

KEEPING UP WITH THE SMITHS

It's at this point that Australian videogame history grows very interesting, thanks to a local eccentric legend, Dick Smith. Famous for many things including his aviator adventures, Smith was a true patriot who believed that Australia branded products were what the populace needed and wanted, and so he formed Dick Smith Electronics. He was also enthusiastic about children's charities, and wanted Australian kids to grow up with the same kinds of computers that their peers around the world enjoyed.

Around 1982, DSE released the Wizzard (competing against Vic 20 & Atari 400), an early attempt at combining the games and computer market. A few years later it released the VZ-200 (to compete against the ZX-80 & ZX-81) and VZ-300 (low price C64 competitor) models. While they were not actually designed or built by DSE – he simply sourced them cheaply from other regions – they were 'rebadged' and had their name, appearance and software tailored specifically for the Australian market.

Understandably, companies such as Apple, IBM and Amstrad didn't like DSE's patriotic strategy of selling locally rebadged systems to the public, and therefore undercutting their attempts at market control. If there was one chink in the DSE armour, it was that they didn't go out into the community and really push the hardware. Additional lack of educational software support also meant that it couldn't infiltrate schools, and therefore homes, very easily, thereby allowing the aforementioned companies to fill the gap.

Amstrad made a deal with the "South Australian Education Department" sometime in the mid-80s to fit schools there with brand new Amstrad computers, mostly CPC6128s, though some claim to have received 464s. While parents were not actively encouraged to buy them for home use, many did. Places such as Radio Rentals sold them in abundance, but despite this, the games themselves were not always quite so easy to get hold of. So big was the movement that there is still an active Amstrad club over there. Apple also got in on the act, practically giving away computers to schools and then encouraging people to buy them for home use. Due to his lack of heavy marketing, and therefore low computer market share, Dick Smith eventually sold his business to the Woolworths group.

But the list of local games entrepreneurs doesn't simply end there. A brief look at The-Underdogs website reveals over 30 different companies in Australia, either developing or

Below: One of Australia's premier locally written Amstrad mags, The Amstrad User

Below (Left to right): A 4 in 1 NES cartridge made in Australia by HES, packaged in VHS style casing and coming with a disclaimer saying you need an original cartridge to use it

Another Australian 4 in 1 cartridge by HES, this time for the Atari 2600

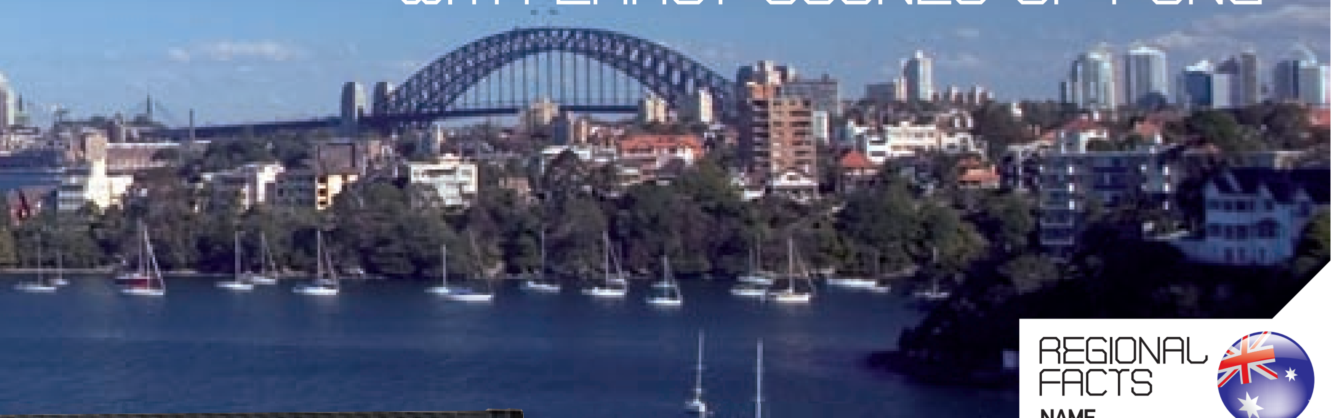
Most of HES' Atari 2600 games were renamed copies of others, but they did release an original game: *My Golf*











"THE GENESIS OF AUSTRALIAN GAMING BEGAN LIKE THE REST OF THE WORLD, WITH EARLY CLONES OF PONG"



Left: The Dick Smith Wizard, one of Australia's earliest games-playing home computers

Left: Sorting income tax, or playing games? What would *you* do with a Dick Smith computer?

REGIONAL FACTS

NAME
AUSTRALIA

LAST EST. POPULATION
20.3 MILLION

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE(S)
ENGLISH (WITH UPWARDS OF 200 ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES/ VARIATIONS)

TIME ZONES
GMT+8 TO GMT+11

TV TYPE
PAL/50HZ

VOLTAGE
240V

CURRENCY
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR (£1 = ± AU$2.3)

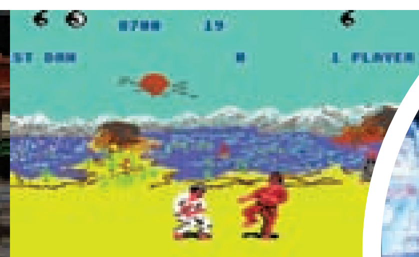
publishing games. Sadly, half of all these are now defunct. The biggest, longest running and most respected is of course Melbourne House and Beam Software; Australia's crowning glories. Every gamer has surely played some of their games, which date back as far as 1980. They include several Speccy and C64 classics, such as *Way of the Exploding Fist*, as well as the SNES's phenomenal *Shadowrun*.

THE SEGA FACTOR

Beyond these, most other companies were little more than distributors. In the early days, Sega games and hardware were sold through the John Sands label. They were predominantly a board game manufacturer, but bought the rights to distribute and market both of Sega's early hardware efforts, the SG-1000 (a games console) and SC-3000 (marketed more as a home-computer), which were something of forerunners to the eventual release of the Master System.

Sega was far more popular than Nintendo back in the day, highlighted by the fact that you could buy Master System stuff literally everywhere: from the local chemist through to big department stores and even some service stations. The NES meanwhile was sold strictly through one or two chains of toy stores. Despite being bigger than Nintendo, Sega never had an official presence in Australia. Sega eventually moved beyond John Sands (now a greeting card company) and started distributing through a group called OziSoft (later renamed Sega-OziSoft).





Above *The Way of the Exploding Fist*, by Beam Software and Melbourne House
Left: One of the greatest RPGs of the SNES era, *Shadowrun*, was developed by Australians

Bootleggers also exist in Australia, perhaps the most well known is "Home Entertainment Suppliers". It dealt in affordable bootleg and unlicensed products that covered a range of systems. HES was big on Atari 2600 and C64, releasing some C64 games on cart that were unique to that format (*Wonderboy, Leaderboard, Kung Fu Master*, etc). It also released a variety of Australia-exclusive multi-carts for both the NES and Master System. Some of its most interesting products were unlicensed NES games. Though it never quite perfected bypassing the security lockout chip, so early cartridges had a dongle coming off the HES cartridge via a ribbon cable. You had to plug a licensed game into this, allowing usage of its security chip. HES eventually improved the design, creating piggyback carts. HES' full history goes beyond the scope of this article but it is still around today, mainly selling peripherals.

Within the last decade there have been some very peculiar gaming quirks specific to the area. For starters they received the Saturn before any other PAL territory (which was all part of testing the market, apparently). This trend for getting PAL products before Europe continued during the N64 days, with the early release of *1080° Snowboarding* (being in the southern hemisphere their winter coincided closer to the game's completion). N64 fans were also treated to a limited edition golden *Ocarina of Time* cartridge that diehard UK gamers imported from Australia. Later Sega astounded Australians by botching the Dreamcast launch, as early adopters were left without any games to buy in the first week. Australian courts recently ruled that mod-chips were legal and beneficial as they overcame monopolistic regional lockout. Today the Australian retro scene proliferates, and there is no finer proof of this than the fact that Retro Gamer is sold there.

ARCADE ADVENTURES

While UK arcades died over time, in Australia they were granted a temporary reprieve. As explained by Matt Campbell, one of Australia's most prominent collectors:

My first memory of arcade gaming was seeing Asteroids in my local fish & chip shop. The trend seemed to be lots of smaller arcades tacked onto something else. Places like cinemas and bowling alleys tended to have whole rooms set aside. Once these became big, dedicated arcades disappeared in a hurry. Arcade owners were shutting up shop and starting to manage these cinema gaming rooms, which became larger than the arcades themselves. By the early nineties proper arcades had practically disappeared. Cinema arcade rooms grew due to the fact that here cinemas are part of huge shopping malls. The idea I suppose was that you could keep teenagers trapped all day in these places.

Despite this initially fortuitous turn of events, local gamers have told us that arcades have turned to shambles in recent years. The people now running them have little clue what they're doing.



Above Cinemas and bowling alleys were the home of many an arcade room in Australia. Sadly, these are now in decline

SPECIAL THANKS MUST GO TO MATT CAMPBELL, DIRELY ILL, TIM NORMAN PLUS LONG TIME READERS, PAUL MONOPOLI AND GABRIEL MCGRATH FOR THEIR GENEROUS ASSISTANCE. CREDIT ALSO GOES TO CONSOLEDATABASE FOR PROVIDING IMAGES.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1985



With profits down and deepening financial woes, computer price cuts, new systems delayed and 1.21 gigawatts, welcome to December 1985. I, Richard Burton power up the flux capacitor to take you back 20 years for a nostalgic trawl through the news of old.



Commodore finally announced the news many were waiting for; the Amiga would be formally released at the Which Home Computer? Show in January. However, the general release date for the machine was pencilled in for June 1986. Although Commodore themselves would not be drawn into revealing the price it had set for the machine, it was estimated to come in at just under £1,000.

Hopefully this would boost Commodore's flagging finances as it also announced a loss in the first quarter profits of almost £30 million. The previous financial year saw total losses of £90 million, although the developing costs for the Amiga and the new C128 were major contributors to those figures.

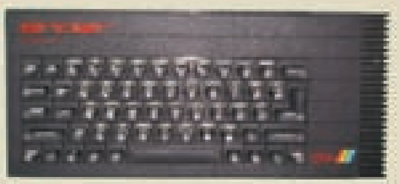
Commodore also revealed a trade-in deal for C64 owners wanting a new C128. By trading in their existing C64 machine they could get £50 whittled off the asking price. A similar promotion was run by Sinclair earlier in the year and proved fairly successful.

Sinclair's own accounts didn't make for pleasant reading either. The company also announced losses for the year of just over £18 million. Quite a dramatic turnaround considering it made a healthy £14 million profit the previous year. This was mainly due to sitting on enormous quantities of stock and also the launch and events surrounding the ill-fated Sinclair C5.

With the impending UK release of the Spectrum 128K in January, Sinclair decided to mark down the Spectrum+ to just £99. We're guessing it didn't have anything to do with the hefty Spectrum mountain it was sitting on, and that it might be left with them after Christmas once the 128K machine made its debut. Nope, thought not…

Price cuts and money losses weren't confined to just the big boys. Some of the other computer producers were feeling the heat of the recent price wars and had to cut their prices too. The colourful looking Enterprise was trimmed to just £119, although a package including a monitor and software package was priced at £229, possibly as a direct competitor to the Amstrad CPC.

Toshiba, one of the producers of the multitude of MSX machines available, followed suit and marked down its HX-10 system to £90 just four months after the first round of price reductions. Tandy also felt the strain and trimmed the price of its systems to £49 for the 16K version and £129 for the 64K system.



» Did you buy a Spectrum + or simply wait for the 128k model?

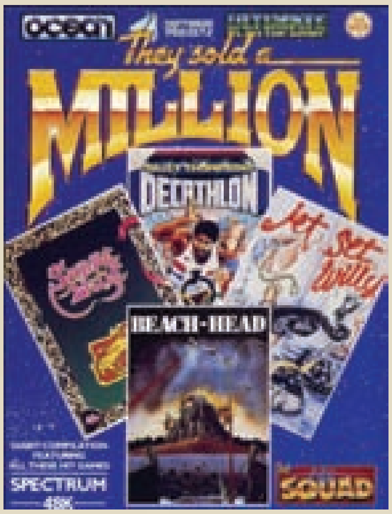
MY PRECIOUSSSSS…



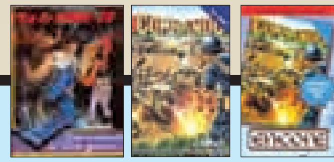
The eagerly awaited follow-up to the hit graphical adventure, *The Hobbit* by Melbourne House, was finally released in this year. *Lord Of The Rings* was the first part of a trilogy of adventures the company planned to release. The game itself was also more technically advanced than *The Hobbit*, with four characters to control and a much more sophisticated parser at your disposal.

Lord of the Rings was initially released on the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 for £14.95 and came complete with a copy of the novel. The remaining two games in the trilogy were both expected to be released in 1986.

They Sold A Million, a compilation featuring games from the biggest and best software houses of the time, went on sale this month. Featuring four hugely popular games, *Jet Set Willy, Sabre Wulf, Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and *Beach Head* which were originally released by Software Projects,



CHARTS DECEMBER '85



AMSTRAD	
1	Yie Ar Kung Fu (Imagine)
2	They Sold A Million (Hit Squad)
3	Finders Keepers (Mastertronic)
4	Soul Of A Robot (Mastertronic)
5	Nonterraqueous (Mastertronic)

SPECTRUM	
1	Commando (Elite)
2	Yie Ar Kung Fu (Imagine)
3	Lord Of The Rings (Melbourne House)
4	Elite (Firebird)
5	Saboteur (Durell)

COMMODORE 64	
1	Commando (Elite)
2	Mercenary (Novagen
3	Little Computer People (Activision)
4	Rambo (Ocean)
5	Last V8 (Mastertronic)

MUSIC SINGLES	
1	Saving All My Love For You (Whitney Houston)
2	I'm Your Man (Wham)
3	See The Day (Dave C. Lee)
4	Separate Lives (Phil Collins & Marilyn Martin)
5	Do They Know It's Christmas Time (Band Aid)

BEST SELLING ALBUMS OF 1985	
1	Brothers In Arms (Dire Straits)
2	No Jacket Required (Phil Collins)
3	Like A Virgin (Madonna)
4	Born In The U.S.A. (Bruce Springsteen)
5	Songs From The Big Chair (Tears For Fears)

Ultimate, Ocean and US Gold respectively.

The C64 version featured Ultimate's *Staff of Karnath* rather than *Sabre Wulf* and the Amstrad compilation required extra work as both *Sabre Wulf* and *Jet Set Willy* had to be written specifically for the compilation.

Software maestro, Ultimate, was news itself this month as rumours spread that it was about to be taken over by British Telecom. Although this was dismissed by a BT spokesman, Ultimate takeover talks were not far away at all…

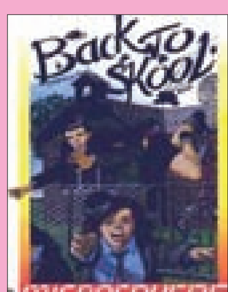
One of the most dismal and inept film licensed games of all-time was released onto an unsuspecting public this month in the form of the pixelated atrocity known as *Friday The 13th* (Domark). Featuring tedious gameplay and miserable graphics across all the systems it was released, it can truly be considered to be the real software horror show. Propelled forward on a vast wave of hype and advertising, what was truly shocking was that it inexplicably sold rather well. Domark, how could you fob us off with such pap?

Elsewhere, Bruce Everiss, former Director of Operations of Imagine (software not publishing!) produced a game from his very own small software house, Everiss Software. The game was a typical space invaders shoot-'em-up for the BBC Micro, but quite why it was given the title *Wet Zone* caused much mirth and chin scratching puzzlement amongst gamers.

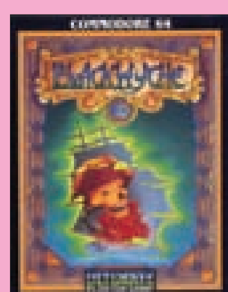
BEST OF THE BEST OF THE BEST



In *Amtix!*, the Amstrad CPC equivalent of *Crash* and *Zzap*, which had only made its debut the month before, rated and awarded it's top honour, the Amtix Accolade, to *Marsport*, the first and only released part of the proposed *Siege of Earth* trilogy (Gargoyle Games), *Cyrus II Chess* (Amsoft), *Lord Of Midnight* (Beyond/Amsoft) and the utility, *Graphics Adventure Creator* (Incentive).



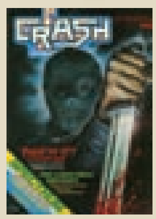
Spectrum owners were given a Christmas gaming feast with a variety of tastes to suit every gamer's taste buds. The Crash Smash cream-of-the-crop games for December were *Back To Skool* (Microsphere), *Tomahawk* (Digital Integration), *Critical Mass* (Durell), *Gyroscope* (Melbourne House), *I Of The Mask* (Electric Dreams), *Terrormolinos* (Melbourne House) and *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole* (Mosaic/ Level 9).



Commodore 64 owners weren't frozen out either with the top Gold Medal award unusually going to a music utility, *Electrosound* (Orpheus). The yuletide Zzap Sizzler's were presented to *Scarabaeus* (Ariolasoft), *Batalyx* (Llamasoft/ Ariolasoft), *ACE* (Cascade), *Blackwyche* (Ultimate) and *Who Dares Wins II* (Alligata).

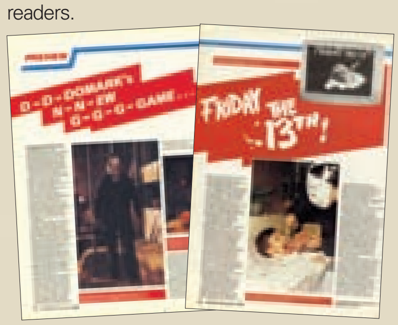
THIS MONTH IN...

CRASH ZZAP! 64



Crash Flash

Oli Frey's ominous looking front cover not only served to announce the arrival of Domark's Friday the 13th game, but also caused massive controversy the following month due to all the complaints it generated from angry readers.





Zzap! Back

Despite only being eight issues old, Zzap!64 was already proving to be an essential read for Commodore64 enthusiasts. The *Zoids* game that Frey's cover was based on may not have been great, but the cover itself looked fantastic.



1985



DECEMBER NEWS

On 27 December, two simultaneous terrorist attacks killed 20 and wounded over 120 at airports in Rome and Vienna. In Rome, four gunmen fired indiscriminately and threw grenades at the check-in desks for Israel's national airline, El Al. Three were shot and killed by police whilst the remaining terrorist was captured.

Meanwhile, in Vienna three terrorists staged a smaller attack on crowds of passengers queuing to get on a flight to Tel Aviv. The terrorists escaped by car but were chased down by Austrian police. One man died and the other two were wounded in the gun battle that ensued. A group known as the Fatah Revolutionary Council headed by ex-PLO member Abu Nidal claimed responsibility.



Dian Fossey, pioneering gorilla behavioral expert, was murdered on Boxing Day 1985. It was suspected that poachers, who she had constantly had problems with, had hacked her to death at the research centre she was running. Her story was made famous in the movie *Gorillas In The Mist* starring Sigourney Weaver.

Finally, film favourite *Back To The Future*, starring Michael J Fox as Marty McFly and Christopher Lloyd as Doc Brown, the Delorean-driving time travelers, made its first appearance in UK cinemas this month.

And just a few days previous *The Goonies*, a group of kids searching for One Eyed Willy's treasure, also made its official UK cinema release, making quite a week for retro film fans. Ah, happy days…

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

OUT WITH THE OLD…



I have some questions about the new look *Retro Gamer* for you. I know its tough to try and please everybody, but could you try and take the following into consideration please?

I've no problems with articles about hardware, but please don't fill the entire magazine with them each month; after all, you are called *Retro Gamer*. Thanks to the joys of emulation, I've now been able to play many games that were unavailable to me in the past, and I'm hoping that you will champion both classic hits and obscure titles that I can then track down.

Retro Gamer often used to do a '5 of the best' but the number was far too small. If I go to a ROM site there can be thousands of games, so which ones should I play? I felt that the retro section to me in games™ struck the right balance, mainly because it was very game orientated and not so geeky. More please.

Yes, I know you have to try and please everyone, but the main reason retro is so popular at the moment is because of emulators and games, not because of some sound chip on a 25-year-old machine. At times, *Retro Gamer* went too technical and as a result, became extremely boring to read. Here's hoping that the new staff remember that it's the games that are important.

Anyway, rant over. Good luck to the mag, I'm really looking forward to it.

P Johns via email

RG: Don't worry, we're fully aware that we've got to please as many people as possible and with any luck this first issue is a step in the right direction. Still, if there are any changes that you'd like to see in the future, you know where to find us.

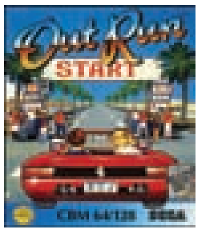
HOMEBREW HERO

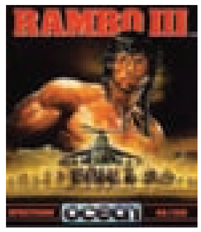
I am writing to let you know how much I enjoy your magazine, and in particular your feature on the Atari 2600 in Issue 12. As a direct result of this, I decided to have a go at programming a homebrew game of my own on the 2600. Your article certainly didn't underestimate the level of difficulty that is involved.

However, after a few months of reading the online tutorials I managed to create my first game: a simplified version of the arcade classic *Hunchback*. I posted a preview of the game on the excellent AtariAge site and it was very well received. Nonetheless, I was astonished when I received issue 17 of your magazine and found that my game, called *Hunchy II* had been featured in your Retro Scene section. It gave me a huge boost to continue programming on the Atari 2600, and I hope to produce more games in the future.

Chris Walton, via email

RG: Chris, we're welling up here! The fact that our feature inspired you to get your hands good and dirty under the hood of the 2600 is one thing. But that you actually managed to create a very playable game is another matter entirely. We can't wait to see what you come up with next.





FIGHT!

Who do you think would win in a fight between US Gold and Ocean?

Dan Chester, Manchester

RG: Well, US Gold certainly had a good reach on it, but we wouldn't want to go up against all those heavyweight film and TV licences. Ocean it is then.

COMPILATION CONFUSION

I just want to have a quick moan about the latest batch of retro arcade compilations on the Xbox (*Midway Arcade Treasures 3* and the *Atari Anthology*). It's great to see companies including more than five games on a disc nowadays, but the fact remains that the older releases for the PS1 are often superior in terms of authenticity and sometimes emulation quality.

The newer versions are lacking options such as full screen and vertical display options, which if you're a true hardcore arcade nutcase can be very disappointing to discover. There's really no excuse for this considering the power of the hardware that's running them. I hope Namco won't be making the same mistakes with its upcoming 50th anniversary release…

Yelski, via email

RG: We agree with you regarding accurate emulation on modern consoles. Midway Arcade Treasures 2 on the PlayStation2 was a disappointment, yet bizarrely the Xbox version was much better. Anyway, we share your high hopes for the new Namco collection and should hopefully be able to review it in the next issue

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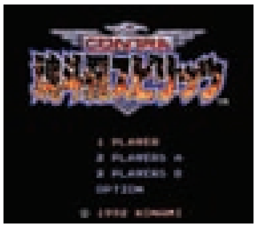
ISSN 1742-3155

IMAGINE PUBLISHING

eMag

CONTRA SPIRITS

MODE 7 HEAVEN



- » **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15



HISTORY

When I look back at those halcyon days of Nintendo's 16-bit console, it's amazing to think that it was Konami, and not Nintendo titles that made up the bulk of my SNES collection.

Sure, I had all the classics such as *A Link to the Past*, the beautifully sublime *Pilot Wings* and the astounding *Super Mario World* (but then, didn't everyone?), but by God, Konami was releasing hit after hit after hit. *Axelay, Super Castlevania IV, Legend of the Mystical Ninja*, virtually every game it released was a must have, and like the Konami crazy slut that I was, I picked up every last one of them.

Still, as impressive as the likes of *Super Castlevania IV* and *Axelay* may have been, it was the outstanding *Super Contra III* that truly defined Konami's output on the SNES for me. No stranger to the joy of importing games – I'd already cut my teeth on Sega's Mega Drive – I hurried down to my local gaming emporium, handed over my £70 (god knows how I could afford that in 1992, I certainly can't now!) and rushed back home. Booting up my US machine (which played certain Japanese titles without the need of an adaptor) I sat back and watched the classic Konami logo scroll across the screen. Five minutes later and I'd lost my first credit, the remaining two got swallowed up less than ten minutes later; damn, it was hard. Unconsciously looking over my shoulder (even though no one else was in my room) I headed over to the option screen, set the game to easy and helped myself to seven extra lives.

If that weird mutant turtle boss at the end of the first level was impressive, the superb Mode 7 effects that made up the bulk of stage two were insane; and just when I'd thought I'd seen the best of the SNES's hardware, Konami kept on flinging even more impressive tricks at me. For me, *Contra Spirits'* defining moment was that superb showdown at the end of level three. I practically jumped out my skin when I saw that massive skeleton tear his way through those cargo doors for the first time, and even today its monstrous visage haunts my dreams...





THE CLASSIC GAME

DIZZY

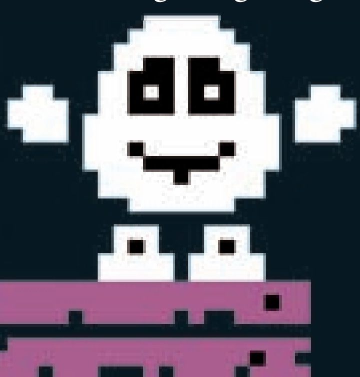
When Dizzy burst on to the scene in 1986, it was with little fanfare. Yet slowly this new character's popularity began to snowball. For Dizzy was not a gung-ho hero; he was a living, breathing egg thrust into the world to solve puzzles. And those puzzles would dominate gameplayer's brains even when they were not sitting in front of the computer. David Crookes looks back at why it was so special – and how it went on to become one of videogaming's longest running series

"By the authors of *Grand Prix Simulator,*" screamed the blurb on the front of the cassette inlay. This was how Dizzy was marketed. The Oliver Twins had put a huge amount of effort into creating something new for gamers – a platform adventure in which the player had control over the destiny of the character. And Codemasters, which released the game, decided to tie it in with a top down racer!

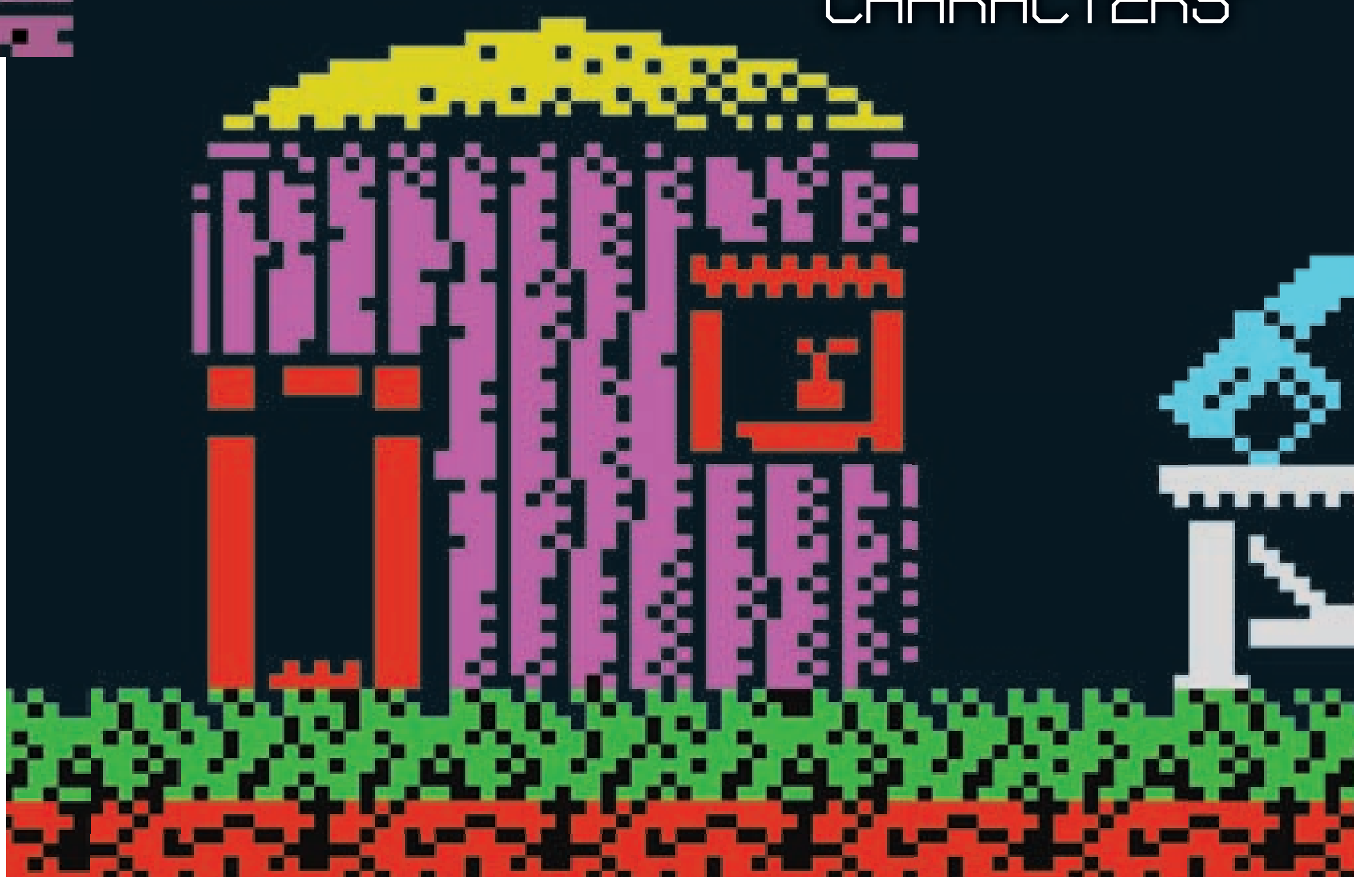
Which was rather strange. For although *Grand Prix Simulator* was a decent game, the blurb's claim was like saying a packet of cheese had been made by a manufacturer of chalk. And yet, ironically, *Dizzy* was born because the authors wanted to shift attention away from the sporting simulators so loved by Codemasters at the time to something new. They wanted to create a cartoon adventure – the 'ultimate' cartoon adventure (at least, that's what the other blurb on the cassette stated).

Yes, The Oliver Twins – brothers Philip and Andrew – did indeed come up with *Grand Prix Simulator.* But then by this time they had also created *Kilapede, Cavey, Ghost Hunters* and *Super Robin Hood*. The latter was an accomplished game with synthesised sound that had you dashing around a flip-screen castle, avoiding copious numbers of baddies to rescue the fair damsel, Maid Marian. It was a far closer match to *Dizzy.* "By the authors of *Super Robin Hood*" – now that would have been much better!

But that's to digress. Dizzy was an anthropomorphic egg complete with big eyes, a smiley face, a pair of big boots and boxing gloves for hands. The idea was that the title would be another stage in the natural evolution of adventure games, which had begun with text-based offerings full of "go north" commands that relied entirely on imagination. Such adventures had begun to incorporate still graphics which illustrated scenes within



"DIZZY WAS UNIQUE IN THAT IT COMBINED A STORY, PLATFORM GAME PUZZLES, WIDELY ASSESSABLE GAMEPLAY AND FUN CHARACTERS"



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** THE OLIVER TWINS
» **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** UP TO £5



the text and therefore relied less on the player to visualise the action.

But the concept behind *Dizzy* was to go a step further. It was to run along the lines of a text adventure without asking the player to use the keyboard to type in commands. Instead, all that was needed was a joystick to control the character and a fire button to pick up and drop various items encountered along the way. Those items would be used as part of puzzles which needed to be solved in order to progress in the game, and while that was happening a story began to build up.

Andrew says: "A lot of the games at the time we wrote *Dizzy* were just too hard or had no story or characters. So *Dizzy* was quite unique in that it combined a story, platform game puzzles, widely assessable gameplay and fun characters."

Using an egg as the main character meant that it would appeal to children. Everything about Dizzy appealed to youngsters – he bobbed up and down on the spot, could walk but didn't mind bouncing and looked cute. The lively soundtrack reinforced the cartoon feel of the game. Even the name was childlike – it came from Dizzy's main attribute which was somersaulting, which meant he would always be dizzy.

Yet the fact Dizzy was an egg was less to do with the cute-factor or branding but primarily because The Oliver Twins found it easier to draw. But the Olivers, in admitting this, modestly downplay their sizeable talents. While they may not have come up with something as fluffily cute as *Titus The Fox* or as athletic as *Impossible Mission*, they didn't just create an egg-shaped character and plonk it on an otherwise real world. Instead, they allowed their imaginations to run riot – and prick the thoughts of the kids.



In fact, the simplicity of the plain Dizzy character allowed gamers to project their own thoughts onto him. It required a further stretch of the imagination to control a walking egg than it did to move Agent 4125 of the Impossible Mission Force, and with the graphical limitations of 8-bit machines, this worked in *Dizzy's* favour.

Andrew says: "*Dizzy* was able to conjure up more in the players minds than the simple 16k Spectrum display would usually be able to. We liken it to the way people often say a book is better than the film, because they imagine it better and the way they want it to be."

Yet once they'd established that Dizzy was going to be an egg, they set about making full use of it. Dizzy would leap high into the air, defying rules of gravity, but like a fortunate feline he would land squarely on his feet. He took on a personality all of his own. The smiling face suggested a jolly, carefree creature, but underlying that was a freedom fighter, an enemy of the state. His aim was to create a potion which enabled him to defeat the evil wizard Zaks and that meant he had to be ingenious, cunning and brutal all at the same time.

DIZZY

SEQUEL EGGCITEMENT

Following the £1.99 tape debut of *Dizzy* came the inevitable sequels – after all, you can't keep a good egg down.

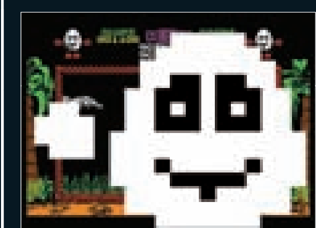
Just two were written solely by The Oliver Twins: *Treasure Island Dizzy* and *Fantasy World Dizzy*. The first came with a few tweaks in 1989: the number of lives was reduced to one – die and you had to start again. But the game continued to hark back to the old text adventures and with the bonus of a side mission to collect 30 coins, it sold in excess of 250,000 copies.

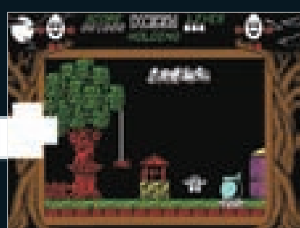
In *Fantasy World Dizzy*, there were three lives and the game was far larger than its predecessors – navigating this new world needed wits, courage and brainpower. Best of all was the introduction of the Yolkfolk: Dozy the lazy egg, Dylan the hippy, Denzil the dude, Grand-Dizzy and the rest. Dizzy could interact with the characters – text boxes would pop up on the screen as a conversation progressed. Andrew says: "In *Fantasy World Dizzy*, we introduced his family, and these added a lot to the sense of purpose. They had many conversations which helped give them all a personality."

From this game on, the reigns were handed over to Big Red Software. The title page of *Dizzy 4* (*Magic Land Dizzy*) merely read: "Based on characters created by The Oliver Twins." Big Red was also responsible for the decent *Spellbound Dizzy*. This had 100 screens, and for the first time, had Dizzy able to snorkel and ride around in coal carts.











» Dizzy gets rid of his red gloves and shoes in the Commodore 64 version



» Crash and Amstrad Action magazines both had cut-down versions of Dizzy sellotaped to their front covers

It instilled in the character a sense of good verses evil and handed the responsibility to the player. Once in control of Dizzy, the player had to slip into a particular mindset. At once, your curiosity was awakened. Upon starting the game and faced with a bobbing egg, a cauldron, a spider in a tree, and a wishing well, you had to make your first choice – to go left or right. Heading left meant you could pick up a mucky grease gun, to the right was a burning torch.

And this set off another spark in the brain of the player. This was a game that required you to do something, to make choices and to think about your actions. There were no guns with which to fight off any attackers in any of their various guises, from birds to spiders or falling apples. So you had to use skill on the joystick to avoid them. Dizzy often had to be positioned at just the right spot to ensure his jump would be perfect and avoid any nasties. But there was also a spot of rudimentary physics to contend with because Dizzy would sometimes continue to roll upon impact with the ground before eventually landing on his feet. And you didn't want him to roll right into danger.

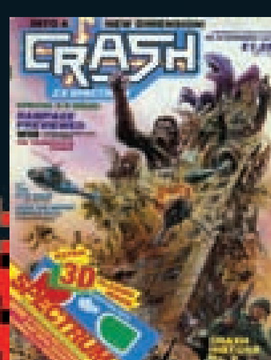
Discovering what would kill and what would not was also part of the fun with the emphasis on exploration. The only living creature, other than Dizzy himself, that would appear to die was Zaks – and he was evil. Defeat him and the world would be a better place. It employed, as many games do, a black and white philosophy which didn't question who would take Zaks' place at the helm of the empire. Yet subsequent games would give you the answer – Zaks would return time and time again which gave the impression that evil would always continue to be present whether in a different form or a re-emerging menace. To defeat evil means to continually do good.

"Now that is getting a little deep," laughs Andrew. "We tried to ensure that the game was made for the correct audience, and it's common in any fairy tale to have an evil person to defeat, and so we went down this route.

But showing any kind of killing wouldn't be right for kids. I'd like to think Dizzy was popular because we tried to be considerate and make the games for the players, in a time when most game makers were making games they thought were cool for themselves.

As for bringing Zaks back, there are many sequel films that end up bringing back people to make the story work again. And as we used a potion to defeat him, who said he'd been killed or gone forever? So we weren't too averse to bringing him back again."

The original *Dizzy* game required logic and some difficult decisions. Although the player controlled a super-strong, able and



THEY SAID:

"I CAN'T FIND ANYTHING NASTY TO SAY ABOUT DIZZY, IT'S JUST SO ADDICTIVE AND NEAT"

CRASH



agile egg, who was able to collect silver linings from clouds and grab the wigs of Leprechauns, you could only carry one item at a time, in the same way Atari's Adventure from 1979 handed you an inventory little bigger than a pocket. The player therefore had to decide what to take and what to leave or, more accurately when to grab an item and when to cast it aside.

It wasn't as sophisticated as allowing you complete free range and you couldn't combine one item with another. But these limitations meant The Oliver Twins worked harder on creating the puzzles which, as the series progressed and the game mechanics were given a few tweaks, would become fiendishly difficult.

The thought processes while playing the games, particularly as children, posed a real challenge. It was frustrating at first – something as simple as using a grease gun to move a cart to allow you to enter a mine proved difficult to those uninitiated in adventure games. But the triumph of solving a puzzle was hard to beat.

"We particularly enjoyed coming up with the puzzle solving elements," Andrew says. "We had to think of simple 'key to door' type puzzles, but they had to be logical, or known to kids through the kind of stories kids would know."

Since there was so much to do in the game, it rarely became dull. The first game was surprisingly high on action and it was very easy to be killed, either by spiders or birds, apples falling from trees or by dead skeletons left in pits. You lived on your wits at times and you could feel your heart beating as you tried to clamour onto a moving, disappearing bridge, knowing you needed to preserve as many of your lives as possible, yet realising a slip would damage your chances of success. This too, was an era before save games could get you out of a hole. *Dizzy* benefited all the more for it.

Ultimately, The Oliver Twins created a world just as eerie and wonderful as the beautiful, crafted worlds which have long existed, from Narnia to Middle Earth. To be able to explore this world yourself was a joy – and although there was a limited number of locations in the first game, you hardly noticed. The puzzles and the one-object-at-a-time nature of them lengthened the game. Even playing it with a full walkthrough guide is difficult and time-consuming because an ill-timed jump or an extended roll into danger can scupper your chances of ever eyeballing Zaks.

When you think this was played primarily by children, it's easy to see why it creates such nostalgia – it ate up so many hours and was the subject of many a playground conversation that it's little wonder the lovable chap has a special place in our hearts.

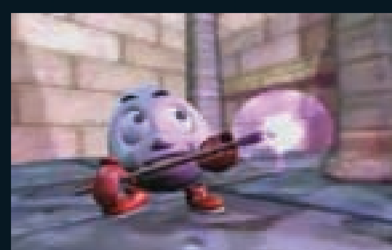


THE BEST OLIVER TWIN DIZZY MOMENTS

1. THE IN-JOKES
In *Treasure Island Dizzy*, you could collect a copy of 'Sinclair Abuser'. This was inserted into the game after the Oliver Twins had taken *Dizzy* to demo at the offices of Sinclair User. The staff subsequently reported that they'd knocked the stuffing out of our hero.

2. THE SURPRISES
When Dizzy comes across Dozy in *Fantasy World Dizzy*, he is sitting on a deckchair at the edge of a pier. Kick him enough times to try and wake him up and watch as the deckchair, including the hapless Dozy, plops satisfyingly into the sea.

3. THE HUMOUR
The *Dizzy* scripts were witty. In *Fantasy World Dizzy*, our hero encounters Denzil. "I was thrown in the dungeons and Daisy's been taken to the wizard's castle," Dizzy tells him. "Oh, we'd all wondered where you two had gone," he replies.



» Light at the end of the tunnel? Dizzy holds a lightstick in a great action-packed 3D trailer at fantasticdizzy.co.uk

MORE DIZZY

OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Treasure Island Dizzy
Fantasy World Dizzy
Magicland Dizzy
Spellbound Dizzy
Dizzy: Prince of the YolkFolk
Crystal Kingdom Dizzy
The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy
Fast Food
Kwik Snax
Dizzy Panic
Bubble Dizzy
Dizzy Down the Rapids
Go! Dizzy Go!

THE WEB
Fans of the Dizzy series can discover more about the infamous egg on the web. There are sites which have all of the games available to download and some carry screensavers and mobile phone ringtones. The best are:

yolkfolk.com
blitzgames.com
fantasticdizzy.co.uk

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER ROBIN HOOD
AMSTRAD/SPECTRUM/C64/ATARI ST/AMIGA//NES [1985]

JET BIKE SIMULATOR
AMSTRAD/SPECTRUM/C64/ATARI ST/AMIGA [1988]

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR 2
AMSTRAD/SPECTRUM/C64 [1990]

BOSS/RUSH

WHEN YOU SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

COUNT DRACULA IN SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV



GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI

It hadn't been easy reaching Dracula's inner sanctum. Destined (or was that cursed) to end the evil undead lord's reign, Simon Belmont had battled all manner of exotic and downright dangerous beasties in an attempt to rid the land of the count's evil influence. Skeletal dragons, immense rock golems, deadly medusas and even death itself had all fallen foul to Belmont's ancestral whip, and now the final battle, the fight to end all fights was drawing near.

Starting off at the base of a crumbling set of stone stairs, Belmont's fast task was to indulge in a little cheating… Jumping from the base of the stairs, Simon landed on an invisible platform; one final leap of faith took him to the base of Dracula's retreat and saw the vampire killer showered with a tasty array of handy power-ups. 99 hearts and two whip enhancements later and Simon was ready to finally walk up that final staircase and face his most hated foe.

Barring an open casket, the magnificent looking room appeared to be completely empty and devoid of (un) life. Just as Simon (and indeed the player) was beginning to get comfortable, wisps of purple energy started electrifying the air. As the motes of energy (and the stunning background music) reached a its climax, Dracula finally appeared, and boy, was he pissed…

Cutting an imposing figure in his luxurious cloak and towering over Simon by a good few feet, Dracula was evil incarnate and immediately launched into a series of deadly attacks. His first trick was to throw a ball of pure energy at the unfortunate Belmont; and while it could be easily whipped, it split it into four smaller balls that were much harder to avoid. Dracula's next attack was to hurl out a tiny ball of energy that would swoop erratically around the screen. If Simon whipped it before it disappeared, the tiny ball would emit smaller globes that would invariably hit him. Again though, deft handling of the whip meant that they could be avoided. While it was a good idea to leave the globes to disappear off-screen, whipping them meant that they eventually turned into pieces of nutritious (and life bar restoring) chicken. Suitably replenished, Belmont waited for Dracula's third line of defence, and the Count didn't disappoint…

A wave of Dracula's hand and Belmont found himself surrounded by four sets of flames; whilst the bottom two would soon disappear, the remaining pair slowly followed the adventurer around the screen until a good whipping sent them to the floor. With his energy low and tricks running out, Dracula finally played his last, deadly card. His face rotted away into a ghostly visage of its former self, the wounded vampire began filing the screen with deadly bolts of lightning that took serious amounts of energy off Belmont's life bar. Luckily, with Dracula out of tricks it was simply a case of lining yourself between the deadly beams and finishing the evil Count off. As the killing blow was administered, sunlight seeped into the room and the dreaded undead lord burst into flames, and eventually, a flock of bats. Finishing the flock off with your whip, one solitary bat settled to the floor. The threat was over. At least for now…

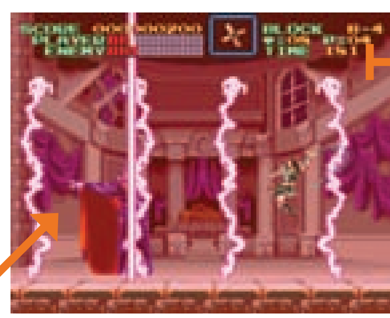
"AS THE MOTES OF ENERGY REACHED ITS CLIMAX, DRACULA APPEARED, AND BOY, WAS HE PISSED…"



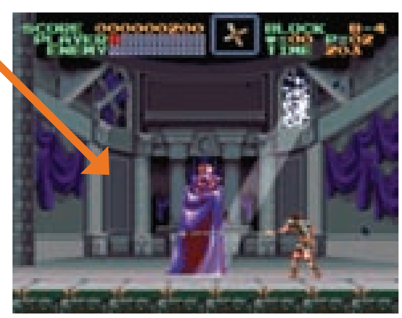
» Don't even try leaping over the projectile, as it'll simply split into four and hit you. Your best bet is to take it out by constantly twirling your whip



» While it's fairly easy to avoid these flames attacks, the top pillars will slowly follow you around the playing area. Best to quickly whip them in order to put them out



» Just a few more hits… Dracula goes into overdrive now, so carefully line your shots up and hit him with all you've got.



» You've finally got him. Now that the dreaded Count is no more you can simply sit back and listen to that superb music

eMag

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

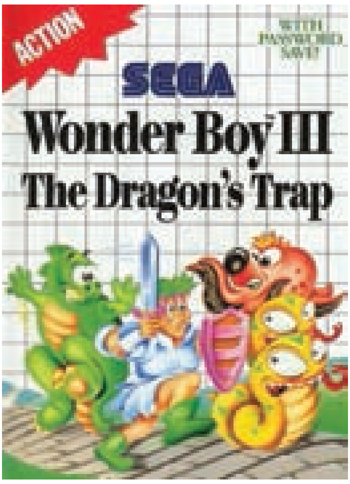
CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver. Take *Wonder Boy III*, for example. This classic Master System title costs less than a packet of fags, lasts a hell of a lot longer and won't give you lung cancer. Bargain.

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

» **SYSTEM:** MASTER SYSTEM » **RELEASED:** 1989 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** WEST ONE



Never ever let it be said that NES owners got all the luck when it came to classic platformers. While it's certainly true that titles such as *Super Mario Bros 3* are absolute classics, Sega's Master System wasn't averse to throwing out the odd killer title. The most impressive was *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* and was quite possibly the Master System's finest hour.

Kicking off from where *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* ended, *The Dragon's Trap* saw your green-haired warrior (we're not sure why his hair's no longer yellow) storming the castle of the evil Mecha Dragon in an attempt to banish him once and for all. After an intense battle (which only the most inept of gamers would be unable to complete), the vanquished dragon had one final trick up his scaly sleeve. A curse on your defeated foe's treasure chest transformed you into a cute fire-breathing dragon. Wonderboy, suitably miffed with his new appearance, set off to find a way to restore himself to his former green-haired glory. The end result was a sprawling epic that successfully married classic platforming



» The many doors in *The Dragon's Trap* took you to a range of different shops, handy warp points or brand new locations



» Lion-Man's sweeping overhead swing allowed him to hit blocks that were often out of reach of the other characters

action to a surprisingly deep adventure.

Every facet of *The Dragon's Trap* was beautiful to behold; take the impressive visuals for example. Not only were they wonderfully vibrant, each sprite displayed real character. Storm clouds were equipped with *Blues Brothers*-styled shades, Angler Fish went goggle-eyed with shock upon getting hit, while mutated sunflowers (well, that's what they looked like) belched deadly bullets.

Despite the varied enemies, the true star of the show was Wonder Boy himself. As he tracked down the game's bosses (huge, beautifully detailed dragons) he gained the ability to morph into four more creatures, each with its own set of unique abilities. Mouse-Man was able to walk upside down on chequered blocks; Piranha-Man gained the handy ability to swim, while Lion-Man had a huge sword that could break blocks above and below him that other characters were unable to reach. Finally, Hawk-Man had the useful ability of flight



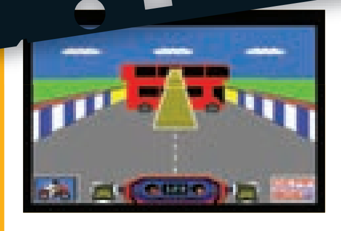
» Piranha-Man was perfectly at home underwater and could dispatch his many enemies with ease

(very handy as the later stages were a bitch to get through). Like his many opponents, each of Wonder Boy's forms was immediately endearing and gave *The Dragon's Trap* an atmosphere that was sadly missing from many similar games.

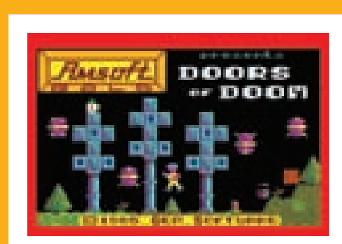
Visuals aside, it was the killer combination of strong level design and unique character skills that made it such a joy to play. As each boss dragon was defeated, your newly acquired form would allow you to access an area that had been previously blocked off to you, and the urge to explore them was immense – mainly because you could never tell what delights lay in store for you. As with *Wonder Boy in Monster Land*, *The Dragon's Trap* featured a variety of different shops that could save your progress (input 'WE5T ONE' for a real treat), restore lost hearts, or more importantly, give you new armour, shields and swords. While certain parts of the game contained a fair amount of backtracking, the ability to constantly change between characters (providing you found the relevant room) kept everything fresh and exciting and constantly spurred you on.

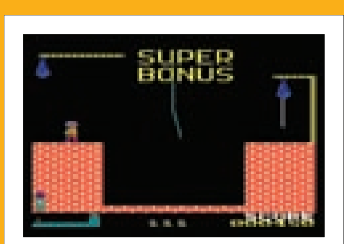
It's somewhat ironic to think that one of the Master System's greatest achievements can be picked up at such a ridiculously low price now. If you're not fussed about a completely mint copy, you can obtain a copy for your collection for less than a fiver and considering how much gaming goodness you'll be getting it's worth its weight in gold.

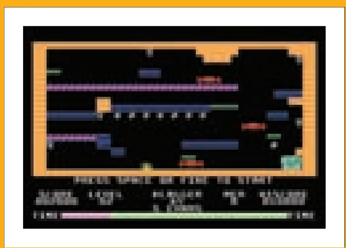
AMSOFT



WHEN IT WAS COOL TO WEAR A BLU RED JUMPER, YELLOW TROUSERS… AND BE NAMED ROLAND…





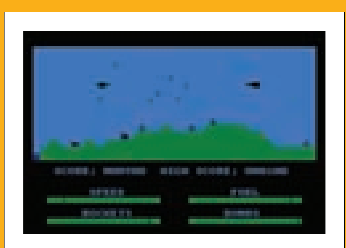


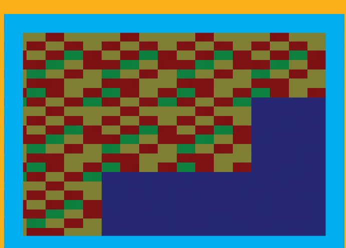
E HAT,

With a penchant for a blue hat, red jumpers and yellow trousers, he looked like an American tourist at best and a cast-off clown at worst. But Roland was one of the greatest hits for Amsoft, a software firm set up by Amstrad to coincide with the launch of the CPC464.

Amsoft was given the hard task of creating 50 head-turning games to be released when the CPC hit the shelves across Britain. David Crookes looks at the impact Amsoft had on the CPC market and why Roland, despite starring in some terrible games, was vital to the company's success











From the gleaming spires of a futuristic city to bucaneering adventures upon a pirate ship, a little ill-dressed chap called Roland was getting stuck in.

It seemed quite odd that this strange fellow would get himself involved in such daring missions. But he just got on with things, his expressionless face never frowning or even raising a smile – all the more surprising since one of his modes of transport was a red, time-travelling phone box similar to Doctor Who's Tardis. And if you can't smile with a cool contraption like that at your disposal, then there's something seriously wrong.

But for Amstrad, Roland was a godsend. He starred in numerous games, helping to boost the CPC's catalogue at a time when it needed it the most. For when Amstrad was gearing up to launch its new computer, the CPC464, it had no games, and that was understandably a major problem.

Amstrad began working on its new machine in August 1983. Boss Alan Sugar was keen to press on, so much so that he had set 11 April 1984 as the date to unveil the computer to an expectant press. With time at a premium, it was vital to make maximum impact, and without games Amstrad sensibly felt that any waves would surely be reduced to ripples if the computer was not launched with a catalogue of titles – particularly so in the face of competition from the likes of Sinclair and Commodore.

The solution to this problem was to launch a software company to coincide with the CPC's unveiling and so Amsoft was born at the beginning of 1984.

The boffins behind the new software publisher were given the task of creating 50 games for the CPC. But there was not enough time for Amsoft to start from scratch and interview and hire its own programmers. So almost immediately, the team decided it would approach third party companies and ask them if they wanted to write and sell their games via the Amsoft brand. It would, they surmised, be the best way of enabling Amsoft to build up a sizeable catalogue of games in time for launch.

The advantages for the software companies were obvious: they only had to write the games and Amstrad would sort out the manufacturing and distribution; slapping on the Amsoft branding so that it was easy to spot a CPC game in the shops.

Amsoft's team went ahead and put out their feelers, approaching many small publishers such as Gem Software, Alligata Software and Indescomp. Eventually the likes of Tasket, Insight, Computersmith, and Postern were also on board and things were beginning to look bright for Amsoft.

Cliff Lawson, who worked on the Amstrad launch and also playtested many of the games, explains: "As has been proven many times since with consoles like the GameCube and N64, a computer, however technically brilliant, lives and dies according to whether there's actually any decent software available.



IN THE KNOW

In brief: Amsoft was originally formed in 1984 when Amstrad wanted 50 games to tie in with the launch of its new CPC. With time at a premium it began hiring third party developers such as Indescomp, Tasket and Insight to create the necessary titles. One game by Indescomp featured a character that Amstrad's boss, Alan Sugar decided to call Roland after Amstrad's technical manager, Roland Perry. A string of games followed and Roland went on to become the CPC's unofficial mascot.



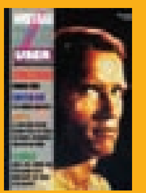
VIVE LE FRANCE

The French market was a brilliant one for Amstrad. Sales of the CPC topped the charts to make it the most popular 8-bit computer, and games were snapped off the shelves in droves – a particularly happy Parisian game shop owner said he sold 200 programs for the CPC each day in October 1986. Amsoft played some part in that. Many of the games released on the Amsoft label in Britain were exported to France and translated into French. Some of the educational entertainment titles were given complete overhauls too, among them was *Les Lettres Magiques*, a French version of *Happy Letters* by Bourne Educational Software. There were also solid text-based games such as *L'Apprenti Sorcier*.

But why was the CPC so popular in France? Roland Perry, Amstrad group technical manager, said: "France was a major market for the CPC machines, especially because we bothered to adapt them to have a French keyboard and French translation of the manuals. "I don't know what the actual impact of the games were, but the market was certainly an important one for us."

AMSOFT

MAGAZINES



Amsoft was not just a games developer. It also ran the Amstrad User Club which offered discounts on computer products and software and launched a magazine called *CPC464 User*. It came out at around the same time as the CPC hit the shops in August 1984. It could hardly have been described as impartial – it's pages, aimed at the serious user, lavished praise on Amstrad – but was useful in offering hints and tips, news and some type-ins (ironically, the standard of type-ins grew so high they were better than Amsoft's earlier releases).

By January 1985, the magazine went on general sale and was retitled *Amstrad CPC464 User*. Again, type-ins featured but there was greater coverage of games too. Among the consultants for the magazine was Roland Perry.

The official Amstrad publications were based at Amstrad's head office in Brentwood. The top brass, including Sir Alan Sugar, were on the top floor of the building. The magazine staff were four floors below. Eventually, the magazine was sold to a publisher. It retained its official status and eventually became *Amstrad Computer User* when the CPC664 was released, shortened much later to ACU.

The magazine eventually closed in May 1992, when Amstrad decided not to renew its licence as official magazine. It became *CPC Attack* for six issues before fizzling away.



"When the Amstrad sales people went to large retailers like Dixons to try and sell the CPC as an item worth stocking, they wanted to be able to say, 'oh and here's 30-40 games you might like to stock'.

"It made the whole proposition more attractive to the retailer and it took the marketing nightmare out of the hands of the individual game developers."

Amstrad sent a total of 50 prototype CPCs to the various software developers interested in writing Amstrad games. The programmers then began delving into the new system, discovering how it worked before attempting to create the games that would be released just months later.

Some of the programmers merely ported existing Spectrum and Commodore 64 titles whereas others wrote new games. Amsoft then acted as the publisher for these games, printing packaging, manuals and duplicating the tapes in order to help them become widely available. Each game, which had a loading screen stating "Amsoft presents…", would be sold for £8.95 on cassette.

Among these goodies emerged a game which starred the aforementioned character, Roland, but it came almost by accident. Programmer Paco Suarez had created a game for Spanish publisher Indescomp in which a character landed on an alien planet at some point in the future and somehow managed to mutate his human form into that of a flea. As the character explored the planet Ivorus, he fell down a pothole into a cave – the task for the player was to get him out while avoiding flesh-eating plants and a menacing pterodactyl.

Alan Sugar had been looking at the game, eyeing it up for a possible giveaway with his new computer. He thought of Amstrad's group technical manager at the time, Roland Perry – and decided it would be fun to name the game after him.

> "WHEN ASKED IF AMSOFT WAS HAP THOUGHT IT WOULD SELL QUITE W GREAT, HE REPLIED: "WE'RE IN THIS ENOUGH TO MAKE A PROFIT, WE'LL

Within a short space of time, Roland became a sort of unofficial mascot for the CPC. Following the game which impressed Sugar, named *Roland In The Caves*, came a host of other titles: *Roland Ahoy, Roland On The Ropes, Roland In Time, Roland Goes Digging, Roland on the Run, Roland In Space* and even *Roland Goes Square Bashing!* And Perry was immortalised forever in pixellated form even though Roland hardly looked the same from one game to the next.

Perry laughs: "Being used as the inspiration for the Roland games was a little joke by Sir Alan. I never thought there'd be such a long series after that."

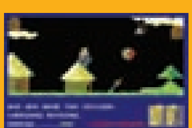
But there was far more to Amsoft than Roland. The company wanted to cover all gaming genres so that there was something for everybody. The ideas for games came from the software houses, but Amsoft had an idea of the number of games from each genre needed. It was therefore a simple case of putting more effort into encouraging the ones it wanted the most.

Amsoft's approach annoyed some software houses, however, and the firm began to gain a reputation – however unfairly earned or not – of being hard-headed, tough and aggressive. It was accused of being less interested in the quality of games and more about making money – it certainly didn't spend thousands of pounds buying up prestigious titles, instead preferring cheap and cheerful games which Amsoft believed it could market well and subsequently rake in the cash.

Peter Roback, Amsoft's software development manager, admitted as much when he told *Amstrad Action* magazine: "There is no way I could go out and spend £50,000 or £75,000 on a product like *Elite* just because it's prestigious to have a title like that on our machine. It's got to be profit making. That is the extent to which we are hard-headed toward software companies. We won't buy programs off them if they aren't going to make us money."

Mike Mordecai, the man in charge of distribution and sales, said the Amsoft team had to source quality software that covered a broad range of interests and highlighted the machines capabilities.

But quality was not always apparent, although even this didn't seem to matter to the firm at first. Some CPC buffs even suggested that because the Amstrad was targeted more at business users who wanted to use the machine for word processing, it was only important for users to see that there were lots of games available in case the parents who bought the machine had children who may want to play them. If the quality wasn't great but the games sold regardless, then so be it. That notion seemed to be confirmed by Peter Roback. When asked if Amsoft was happy to push out a game if they thought it would sell quite well, even if the quality wasn't great, he replied: "We're in this to make money. If it will sell enough to make a profit, we'll sell it."



FINEST HOUR

SORCERY+

An utterly superb adventure title that proved the CPC was no slouch when it came to pushing around impressive looking sprites. Whilst the first half of the game is basically the original game *Sorcery*, the second half is greatly improved and sees the player seeking out four golden hearts. Utterly compelling.

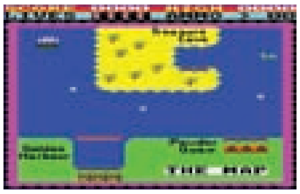
GAMES REVIEWS



ROLAND IN THE CAVES

AMSOFT/INDESCOMP (1984)

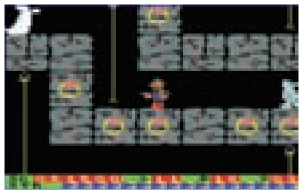
» Trapped in a cave, Roland changes his entire appearance and becomes a flea! And like all good fleas, he has to flee in a bid to save his life. This platform games looks cheerful enough but the game is frustrating. There are some neat touches: the strength of your flea is determined by timing your pressing of the fire button just right. But despite being quite addictive *Roland in the Caves* is far from a classic. **6/10**



ROLAND AHOY

AMSOFT/COMPUTERSMITH (1984)

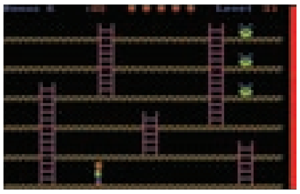
» Roland commands a pirate ship for this instalment of his many adventures, zipping to Golden Harbour to pick up goodies before taking them to Treasure Cove where they are deposited in a secret cave. Fast, with basic graphics and a lame attempt at a sea shanty, *Roland Ahoy* is tricky at first, but rapidly becomes repetitive once you get the hang of it. It has to be said, a low point in the Roland discography **4/10**



ROLAND ON THE ROPES

AMSOFT/INDESCOMP (1984)

» Our intrepid explorer becomes lost at the bottom of a tomb and he has to find his way back up to the top, collecting treasure along the way. Helping him in his quest are many handily placed ropes strewn across 31 difficult, badly scrolling levels, only part of which are displayed on-screen at any one time. Use the terrible control system to avoid the ghosts, mummies, vampires and skeletons. **5/10**



ROLAND GOES DIGGING

AMSOFT/GEM (1984)

» After his adventurous jaunts on pirate ships and in tombs, the title of this offering sounds rather more mundane. And it is. There's nothing new here. Pitted amid aliens, you have to dig holes so that the enemy drops into them. The screen has five platforms, connected by ladders, and the action is crazily fast at times. It's made even harder since the aliens, if left, fill in the holes and continue to pester you. **5/10**

PY TO PUSH OUT A GAME IF THEY
ELL, EVEN IF THE QUALITY WASN'T
TO MAKE MONEY. IF IT WILL SELL
SELL IT." "

All of this meant that by the time Sugar was ready to unveil his new pride and joy to a salivating press, there were ten Amsoft titles available, with the remaining 40 out in time for the day the CPC was sold in the shops. Some of the games were bundled with the Amstrad for free, including the mediocre *Roland On The Ropes*, the notable *Harrier Attack*, the decent shoot-'em-up *The Galactic Plague*, the dire action arcader *Bridge-It*, the passable *Fruit Machine* and terrible puzzler *Xanagrams*.

But the games that were sold, sold well – particularly the Roland titles, despite their varying quality. When Amsoft published its October 2004 chart in issue one of *Amstrad User* magazine, Roland games made up three of the top five games (*Caves, Ropes* and *Digging*).

As time went on, the quality of the games got better once games programmers discovered the best ways of working with the CPC. After the initial 50 games were released, software developers began to take more time over their games. And whereas, the original line-up of releases were primarily conversions of games created for other computers, with more time, software houses began to write specific Amstrad games from the ground up.

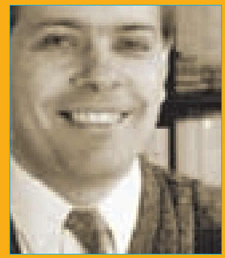
Shortly after the launch and prior to unleashing the second generation of Amsoft titles, Roback said the firm had no choice but to spend six months asking for games to be knocked out to its specifications. He went on to say: "We've now earned the reputation to allow people like US Gold to launch stuff under the Amsoft label. People like Beyond Software wouldn't give us products like *Lords of Midnight* to bring out under the Amsoft label if they didn't think they were getting a very good deal and were doing better by bringing it to Amsoft than by doing it themselves."

Mordecai added: "Taking it to the extreme, we've proved what we can do with rubbish. Imagine what we can do with good titles."

To be fair, this second wave really did produce some classic games. *Sorcery* was a wonderful example of an adventure game, only bettered by *Sorcery Plus* which was a disc-only enhanced title of the original released for £13.05 on the Amsoft Gold label. Both were produced by Virgin and released by Amsoft and had a quality unseen in previous Amsoft titles.

Later, *Doors of Doom*, a decent action game was also re-released on disc with enhancements and Amsoft did a deal with top dogs Ocean, releasing games such as Hunchback under the Amsoft brand – many of these were given away with the CPC6128.

But as time went on, Amsoft took more of a back seat. Other software companies were coming on to the scene, creating games not just for the CPC but for other machines too. Top coders such as Ocean and US Gold were growing at a phenomenal rate and were churning out polished titles that wiped the floor with much of the competition. With the emphasis now on quality gaming, Amsoft eventually left them to it and the name disappeared into gaming history.



Q&A

ROLAND PERRY

(EX-GROUP TECHNICAL MANAGER, AMSOFT)

Roland Perry was Amstrad's group technical manager at the time of the launch of the CPC and Amsoft. He also lent his name to Amsoft's infamous series of Roland games. As he was the "father" of the CPC and responsible for supporting a lot of the game developers, it was quite natural that Amstrad would pay homage to him.

Retro Gamer: What was it like working for Amstrad at this time?
Roland Perry: The main difficulty we had with everything leading up to the launch of the CPC was the time. We only had three months to go from concept to first working prototype of the machine but I had a great team and we made it. It was easier than it might otherwise have been because we learnt a lot from the mistakes made by earlier designers.

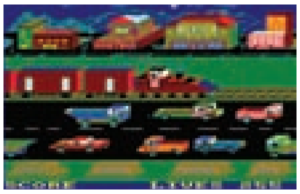
RG: Who came up with the Amsoft idea?
RP: Sir Alan Sugar. The idea was that the CPC should launch with 50 games, because no-one would buy it unless there was a reasonable catalogue available from day one.

RG: Was Sir Alan difficult to work for?
RP: No. It was good to work with Sir Alan Sugar. He had very strict standards, but you always knew were you stood."

RG: The software development manager at the time, Peter Roback, said there had been complaints from developers that all Amsoft was interested in was wiping third party software houses out and taking the market for themselves. Was this the case?
RP: There were third-party games for the CPC, but most software houses preferred to have Amstrad do the manufacturing and distribution, and part of that deal was the Amsoft branding.

RG: What were your favourite Amsoft games?
RP: The CPC project was quite an adventure in itself but my favourite games were *Roland In Time* and *Harrier Attack*.

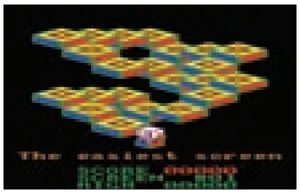
RG: Why did the Amsoft branding fizzle out in the end?
RP: The third party software houses became bigger.



ROLAND ON THE RUN

AMSOFT/EPICSOFT (1984)

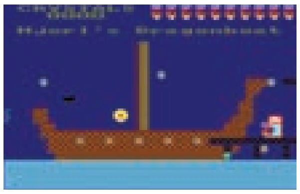
» The best game in terms of story – yet the worst for gameplay. Roland and his pals are held captive by Amsoft and end up on a 4.45pm freight train leaving Brentwood station. The graphics are great – colourful and with good detail. But trying to get your 254 mates off the train by making them jump to safety into passing lorries just goes on and on. Amazingly for a chase game, *Roland on the Run* is just boring! **2/10**



ROLAND GOES SQUARE BASHING

AMSOFT/DURELL (1984)

» Another woeful display from Roland. This 3D puzzler sees Roland – who this time has become a square (there were many blatant attempts to capitalise on Roland's name) – travelling from one block to another until they all disappeared from beneath his feet. It looks good, the premise sounds challenging but it's slow and you never feel as if your using your brain, just trial and error. **2/10**



ROLAND IN TIME

AMSOFT/GEM, (1984)

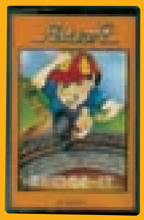
» In his Doctor Who guise, Roland whizzes backwards and forwards through time to any one of ten time zones. Cue phone box and whooshing time travel noise. This sci-fi homage (or rip-off) looks terrible, plays just as bad and yet was highly successful. The ten lives are nowhere near enough and the frequent deaths as you played this platform game means it will soon be put away under a pile of clothes in the attic. **4/10**



ROLAND IN SPACE

AMSOFT/GEM (1985)

» Things get a little better with this time-travelling sequel. The colourful graphics are a slight improvement and there are some good speech synthesis giving you advice – "don't panic" being one pearl. You have to visit seven planets while searching for 158 pieces of a super weapon. And like most Roland games, it is difficult, which means the game took a long time to finish, yet, in this case, poses a challenge. **7/10**



AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

BRIDGE-IT

Everything about *Bridge-It* stank. The cover was atrocious the ungainly looking sprites were an absolute eyesore and it suffered from some of the worse controls ever. Even the fact that it was given away free was little commiseration to the poor sods that got to play it.

MAGIC MO

Sometimes you'll play a game and certain parts of it will stay in your mind forever. Join us as we slip on our rose-tinted spectacles and look back at some of the greatest videogame moments of all time

STRIDER

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1989 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

1



» You're only a short distance into stage 2 and you've already come face-to-face with this giant beast. Give him what for and then continue up that handy ravine.

Every now and then, a game comes along that constantly manages to amaze. Sometimes you're impressed by its innovation, other times will be spent marvelling at its striking aesthetics or simply revelling in a remarkable moment that you've never witnessed before. And sometimes, if you're *really* lucky, you'll find a game that manages to offer a constant high that becomes impossible to come down from. The second stage of Capcom's excellent *Strider* is one such example.

After hang gliding into a futuristic Russia, Capcom's purple-clad ninja heads to Siberia in order to start the second leg of his five-stage journey. Landing in the bitterly cold wilderness you're immediately set upon by ferocious wolves, no doubt intent on feasting on your insides. Deftly giving them the slip and sliding under a hastily descending gate, you immediately came face to face with one of the largest game bosses you'd ever seen; a monstrous metallic ape intent on grinding you into the cold icy floor.

With no time to gape at the impressive beast, it was simply a case of wading in you're your laser sword and giving the metallic ape a damn good thrashing. As the monster erupted into a ball of flames, the plucky ninja escaped by climbing up a nearby tunnel, only to find that it led into a huge cog room that was filled with enemy soldiers. Fortunately, they quickly fell to your lethal blade and with your enemies defeated it was simply a case of catching a ride on one of the constantly moving platforms that led to a nearby exit – a nearby mountaintop.

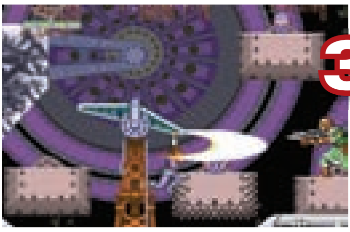
Reaching an icy summit the slowly building background music began to catch your attention and suddenly assaulted you with a glorious wall of sound – 'Big Run' fact fans – that perfectly matched your rapidly beating heart. Hastily dispatching the Capcom equivalent of Boba Fett, the next moment was pure magic. The plucky little ninja ran/fell/stumbled down the entire mountainside; setting off plenty of explosions along the way – only to find that the exit ended with a dizzying drop. Still, it was no problem for the athletic

2



» Okay, so puple isn't exactly the most fitting colour for a ninja, but there's no denying how nimble Strider is.

3



» These guards prove to be annoying, but there are quite a few power-ups to collect, so it's worth taking them all out.

MENTS



» Quite possibly one of the greatest moments from any game ever. Run down the mountainside and gasp in amazement as it literally explodes behind you



» Who turned out the lights? This section may look impressive but some very dangerous adversaries



» The backdrop might look stunning, but these mechanical creations proved to be a right nuisance for the poor ninja

Strider and a simple stab of the jump button saw you clearing the drop with ease. It's a wonderfully orchestrated moment that still makes us tingle with delight whenever we remember it.

Your journey was far from complete though, and once again you found yourself attacked on all sides by more hungry wolves. To make matters worse, a nearby power failure meant that the surrounding countryside was plunged into intermittent darkness. With enemies all around you, your only option was to enter a nearby construction site, avoid its mechanical occupants and climb to safety. Once you'd reached a safe height, it was simply a case of leaping onto a nearby flying skiff and seeing where it took you.

As the skiff ascended, deadly bombs began to drop downwards and had to be nimbly avoided by leaping to any other nearby skiffs. Finally, you reached a huge airship (and the source of all those troublesome bombs) and could almost smell victory. Even now though there was little time to rest, which in itself was a shame, as the airship looked magnificent. Slowly making your way to the back of the craft, your next task was to take out an annoyingly placed cannon and find a way to break into the ship's control room. While the cannon itself didn't pose much of a problem, the three athletic women that guarded the exit were a different matter entirely. Armed with deadly scissor kicks and a breath-taking grace, they posed a huge threat, and your first encounter was likely to meet with failure. A bit of perseverance (and some frantic sword swinging) eventually saw the triumphant ninja taking over the controls of the air ship and sailing to the next stage. Utter class.



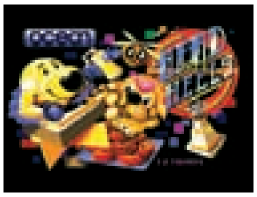
» You've made your way to the back of the air ship and have nearly reached the end of the stage. Not long now…



» Just a few more enemies to defeat and you're home free. Who said a ninja's life was easy?

HEAD OVER HEELS

AND THEY CALL IT PUPPY LOVE



- **PUBLISHER** OCEAN
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC PUZZLER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

Though the isometric puzzler, *Batman*, had earned Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond legions of fans and rave reviews two years previously, it was *Head Over Heels* that would firmly cement their place in videogaming history.

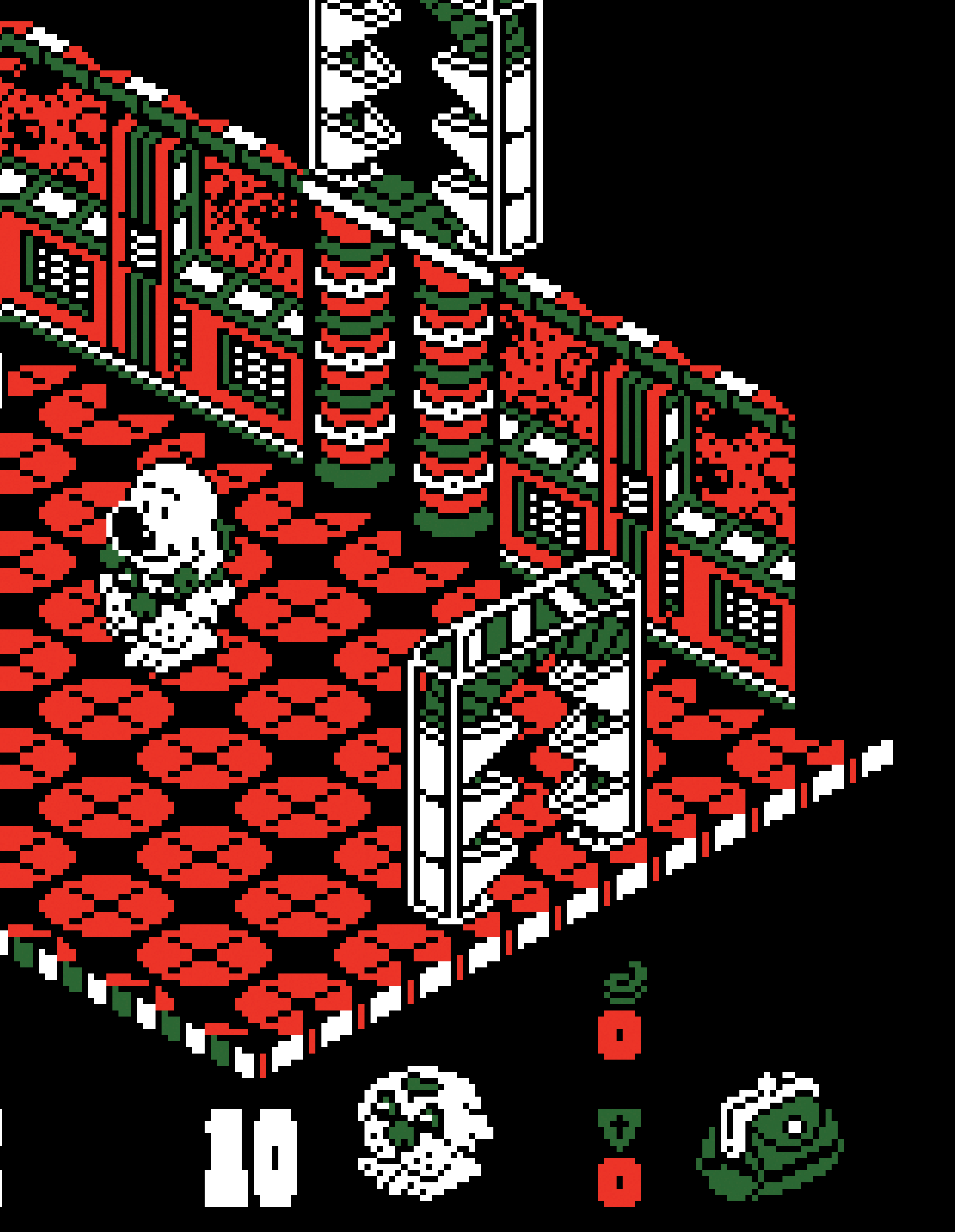
Taking the concepts from the superhero epic, Ritman and Drummond stretched them yet further to create something that would be twice the size of *Batman* and would offer double the challenge. Weighing in at over 300 screens of lateral-thinking mayhem, it would bend the mind of even the cleverest of gamer.

The concept was simple: you controlled two dog-like animals, each with different strengths and abilities (Head could jump and fire doughnuts, whilst Heels could carry objects and move at speed). Of course, this combination of skills would prove to be necessary to complete the increasingly fiendish puzzles that were laid before you. However, the real joy was that for a few precious screens the two could conjoin to make one super character that had use of both skill sets. Sure, there was a great little plot about overthrowing an evil regime on planet Blacktooth, but for our money, it was our sheer determination to get those two critters back together and the ensuing joy that it delivered that kept us coming back for more.

Take off the rose-tints and you find a game that is frustratingly hard (if ever a game defined pixel-perfect, then this is it!) and slower than a wheezing sloth attempting to climb Everest. It's quirky British humour (that poked fun at Prince Charles and the Daleks) and the hugely demanding gameplay have sadly dated – time has not been too kind on the two hapless critters, even if you manage to get hold of the splendidly updated PC version by Retrospec.

Nevertheless, if Drummond picked up his art brush and Ritman decided to stretch his fingers over a keyboard to make a sequel, we'd be happier than the proverbial porcine in its or any else's doings.




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Year Released: 1982

Original Price: £125 (£175 48k)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated Magazines: Crash, Your Sinclair, Sinclair User, Sinclair Programs, Sinclair Answers, ZX Computing

Why the Spectrum was great… Owning a Spectrum was like being part of a secret club. Like-minded gamers who knew what it meant to type out hundred line pokes, wait ten minutes for *The Hobbit* to load, and had mastered the art of tape-to-tape copying.



Sinclair ZX Spectrum





THE HUMBLE SINCLAIR SPECTRUM WAS SMALL AND UNASSUMING, YET IT MANAGED TO CONQUER THE UK COMPUTER MARKET DURING THE EIGHTIES AND WAS COMMERCIALLY VIABLE FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. DURING THIS TIME THE MACHINE WON THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS AND A THRIVING FAN SCENE NOW EXISTS. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE LITTLE COMPUTER THAT OVERCAME THE ODDS AND MADE IT BIG

Having made a name for himself in the electronics field, releasing everything from pocket calculators to tiny televisions, Sir Clive Sinclair turned his entrepreneurial gaze toward computers, and in 1978 he launched the MK14. It was sold in kit form and proved to be little more than a programmable calculator, but sales of over 50,000 convinced Sir Clive that there was a hunger for computers aimed at hobbyists.

In early 1980 Sinclair released the ZX80, a diminutive home computer with a touch-sensitive membrane keyboard and just 1K of memory. It too was sold in kit form for £79, but crucially a pre-built version was available for £99, opening up the world of computers to more general home users who weren't prepared to whip out a soldering iron and start bolting bits together. However, it was the ZX80's successor, the enhanced and improved ZX81 that really kick-started the home computing craze in the UK. Released in March 1981 and available for either £49 (kit form) or £69 (pre-built), the ZX81 clocked up sales of more than 400,000 in a little over 12 months. Sinclair had devised the ultimate entry-level computer and the British public were buying into it.

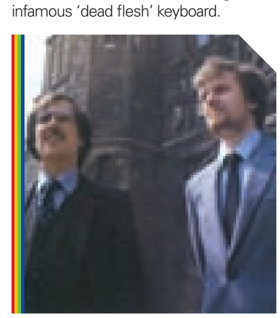
But Sir Clive wasn't about to stand idly by, counting the cheques and postal orders that were pouring into his hectic mail order department. The industry he'd had a hand in creating was moving fast, very fast, and competitors were queuing up for a piece of the pie. To compound matters, the cost of components and memory was tumbling all the time, allowing more manufacturers to tap into the low-cost computer market that belonged almost exclusively to Sinclair. Plus, there was the small matter of Acorn beating Sinclair to a lucrative BBC contract that would ultimately see Acorn computers installed in classrooms up and down the country. It was time for Sir Clive to dig in and fight his corner.

To this end, Sinclair began to mastermind the ZX82 and ZX83 models. The former would supersede the ZX81, adding sound

Tech specs

A trusty Zilog Z80A chip running at 3.54MHz powered the Spectrum. The machine was available with either 16K or 48K of RAM, and Sinclair BASIC was provided on a 16K ROM chip. The video display could output 24 lines of text with 32 character positions, and 192x256 pixels for high-resolution graphics. The Spectrum had very few external connectors. There was TV out, ear and mic ports to connect a tape recorder, and a 28-pin expansion slot for connecting a wide range of peripherals, including joystick interfaces, printers and Sinclair's own Microdrive storage system.

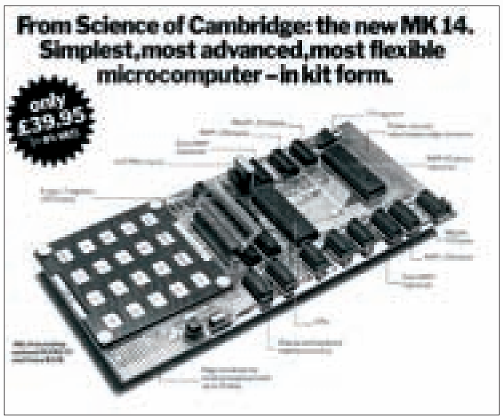
Sinclair's Richard Altwasser, who had previously helped develop the ZX81, designed the Spectrum's hardware. The ROM code was written almost entirely by Steve Vickers of Nine Tiles Information Handling Ltd (a small portion was adapted from the original ZX80 ROM code written by John Grant), while Sinclair designer Rick Dickinson created the casing and infamous 'dead flesh' keyboard.



» The men behind the Spectrum, Steve Vickers (left) of Nine Tiles and Richard Altwasser of Sinclair Research



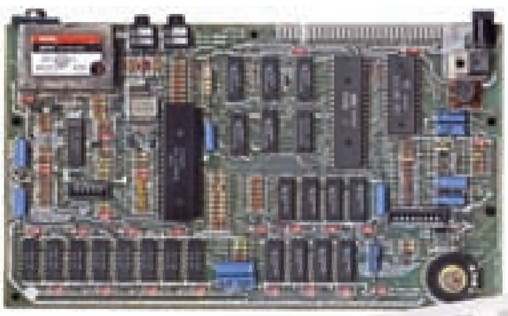
sinclair ZX Spectrum



» The MK14 was Sir Clive's first home computer and today is highly sought after by Sinclair collectors



» The first Spectrum print ad sang the Spectrum's praises, so far as to even include a glowing quote from Sir Clive himself!



» The Spectrum was a fairly simple machine with no dedicated graphics hardware and limited expansion options (photo: Bill Bertram)



» Released in April 1982, the Spectrum went on to become the UK's best selling home computer

capabilities, colour graphics and a moving keyboard to the mix, while the latter was hoped to seize control of the small business market.

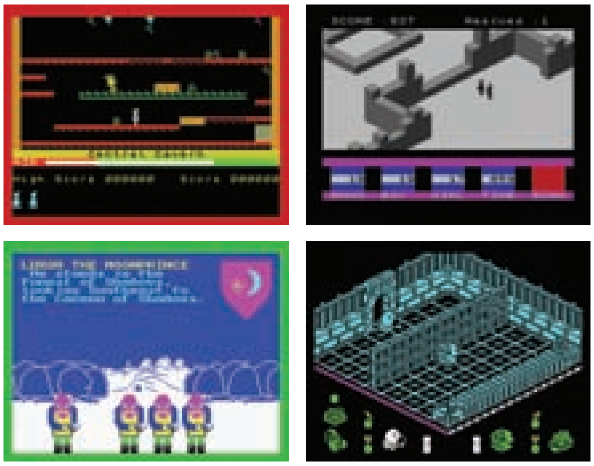
The eventual fortunes of the two machines couldn't be more different. The ZX82 was renamed the ZX Spectrum and went on to become Britain's best selling home computer. The ZX83, meanwhile, was launched as the Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap) in 1984 and failed to make an impression as a business machine. The QL is now regarded as an embarrassing footnote in the Sinclair story, second only to the disastrous C5 motorised tricycle (although to be honest, the C5 is probably more of an epitaph than a footnote).

RAINBOW BRIGHT

In April 1982, long before the QL and C5 tarnished Sir Clive's name, the Spectrum was launched in a blaze of publicity at the Earls Court Computer Show. Shortly after its unveiling, an advert for the new computer began to appear in specialist computer magazines. It was typically text-heavy and very Sinclair, hammering home each of the machine's 'astonishing' new features. Topping the list of key features was the Spectrum's high-resolution colour graphic capabilities. Whereas the ZX80/81 were monochrome machines, the Spectrum lived up to its name by outputting seven colours plus black. Sound support was also included, with the new BEEP command allowing you to control pitch and duration. The advert went on to reveal details of a full-size moving keyboard that would replace the plastic membrane used on the ZX80/81. To seal the deal, the Spectrum came with a very generous amount of RAM – 16K as standard, with an expanded 48K version also available.

But what about the price? Would Sir Clive be able to continue his noble aim of delivering affordable computers to the masses? The answer was a resounding yes. The 16K model was available for just £125, and for £50 more you could take home the 48K version. Compare that to the Commodore 64, which launched in the UK at £299. Or even better, the BBC Model B, which would lighten your pockets to the tune of £399. Sinclair had soundly undercut the competition and looked to have sewn up the market once again.

The advert posed a problem however. The Spectrum simply sounded too good to be true. All those features for such a competitive price. There had to be a catch. But before anyone could see the machine and make up their own minds, they had to suffer Sinclair's famously unreliable mail order department. Customers were advised to allow up to 28 days for delivery, and yet those who'd placed their orders early typically had to wait between 12 and 16 weeks for their shiny new machines to arrive. During the latter half of 1982 Sinclair was reportedly manufacturing 20,000 Spectrums a month and yet was still unable to meet the huge demand. It didn't help that a quantity of machines were earmarked for overseas markets following a steady European roll out. Things did ease somewhat by early 1983, mainly because the Spectrum was made available though WHSmiths and other high street chains.



» Great games that made a splash on the Speccy. From left to right: Manic Miner, Ant Attack, Lords of Midnight and Head over Heels

RUBBER SOUL

The advert flagged the Spectrum as a "powerful professional's computer", but in several respects the new computer was very similar to its more primitive forebears. It's believed that this was intentional on Sir Clive's part as a means of speeding up production and keeping costs down.

At first glance it was obvious that Sinclair had performed another miracle of miniaturisation. The Spectrum was just 23cm wide, 14cm long and 3cm deep. The most noticeable new addition were the small rubber keys that poked through the sleek black casing. A single sheet of spongy rubber was used and by pressing down on a key, the contact underneath was closed and then the key sprung back to its original position. It was preferable to the ZX81's touch-sensitive keyboard, and probably just as cost effective, but to call it a 'full-size, moving-key keyboard' was a little optimistic.

The actual keyboard layout was almost identical to the one that debuted on the ZX80. There were 40 keys in total, compared to an average of 60-70 keys found on computers with proper typewriter-style keyboards. The updated Sinclair BASIC retained its one-touch keyword entry system, where a typical key could be used to enter five different commands depending on which shift keys it was pressed in conjunction with. This input method baffled beginners and proved far too restrictive for more seasoned users. To complicate matters, a number of new BASIC commands were introduced, taking the total number of keyboard functions to a finger-bending 193. In some cases it would be quicker to manually type the command than press the required series of keys. Again, the advert was slightly wide of the mark with its "one-touch" keyword entry claims.

What about the new colour capabilities? Well, Sinclair actually undersold the Spectrum in this respect. There were eight basic colours, yet the BRIGHT command could be applied to every colour except black, making 15 in total. Coupled with the surprisingly high screen resolution (256 x 192 pixels), the Spectrum's display capabilities could rival machines retailing at twice the price. There was a drawback however. To save memory, each 8 x 8 pixel square could only display a foreground and background colour. As a result, in games where a character sprite of one colour passed over a background of a different colour, the colour of the sprite would bleed into the background. This so-called colour clash effect was unique to the Spectrum, much to the amusement of Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC owners. We can now look back and say that colour clash gave Speccy games a certain charm, but back in the day such wistful reasoning would never have settled those playground spats.

Rather than blast sound through your TV set, the Spectrum featured a small internal speaker. It was affectionately known as the 'beeper', because it, well, beeped, and that was about it. You could control the length and tone of the beep but not the volume, which was a shame because the speaker was barely audible in the first batch of models off the production line (later versions corrected this problem to some extent). Worse still, the speaker would temporarily freeze the processor while it played a sound. Considering what they had to work with, it's amazing that programmers managed to add sound effects and music to games at all. Even more remarkable is that musicians like Martin Galway and Tim Follin developed routines that simulated multiple sound channels. It was also possible to play sampled speech through the speaker, albeit in very crude fashion.

PLAY THE GAME

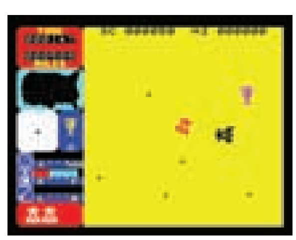
Despite these technical shortcomings, the Spectrum quickly generated a huge range of independent software. Games were incredibly popular and unofficial versions of arcade classics such as *Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Breakout* quickly flooded the market. Software houses that had sprung up to support the ZX81 were drawn to the new machine, attracted by its colour graphics, relatively huge memory (the 48K version at least), and rapidly growing user base.

Bug-Byte, Mikro-Gen, Quicksilva, Imagine, Ocean and dozens of other developers made a name (and a small fortune) for themselves during these early years, but one company in particular stood out from the crowd. Ashby Computer and Graphics Ltd, then operating under the trade name Ultimate Play the Game, now known as Rare, set the whole scene alight with a series of stunning Spectrum games. Its first four releases (*Jetpac, Pssst, Cookie* and *Tranz Am*) became best selling classics that other developers could only dream of, and yet they all ran on a standard 16K Spectrum. Ultimate's 48K games were bigger and better, with titles like *Atic Atac, Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* whipping the computer press into a dribbling frenzy. Other ground-breaking games that debuted on the Spectrum before being ported to different machines included Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner,* Sandy White's *Ant Attack,* Mike Singleton's *Lords of Midnight* and Jon Ritman's *Head over Heels*, amongst many others. The Spectrum really was home to an embarrassing number of great games.

It was this catalogue of games, as wide as it was deep, that pushed sales of the Spectrum through the roof. In the run up to Christmas 1983, over 50,000 machines were sold every month in the UK. As the cost of components fell, Sinclair fuelled demand further by slashing the price of the Spectrum. The 16K model was reduced to just £99, nestling just under the psychological price barrier of £100, and the 48K version retailed at a very attractive £129.

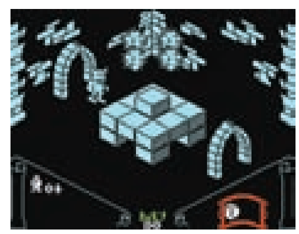
This was the Spectrum's golden period, but sadly it didn't last much beyond 1984. In October of that year Sinclair released the Spectrum+, which rather than a souped-up Speccy that buyers and retailers hoped for, merely added a moving QL-style keyboard. Similarly, the long-awaited Spectrum 128, which received a low-key UK launch in February 1986, was essentially a Spectrum+ with 128K memory, a new three channel sound chip and an updated version of Sinclair BASIC. These updates were cautious, lazy even, perhaps because by this time Sinclair's focus (and finances) had shifted almost exclusively to the doomed C5 project. In summer 1986 Amstrad acquired Sinclair's computing arm and went on to create Spectrum-based clones of its popular CPC range. Amstrad's +2 and +3 models were marketed as games machines and certainly attracted new buyers, but those who'd fallen in love with the ZX line would sadly never see a true successor to the Spectrum. Perhaps if Sinclair had continued to attack the competition as aggressively as it had done during the early Eighties then a 16-bit computer capable of undercutting the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST might have been a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, a place in computing history is unreservedly set-aside for the not-so-humble Sinclair Spectrum.







» Sinclair Research boss Sir Clive Sinclair, pictured here at the QL launch in January 1984



The wonderful World of Spectrum

Speccy fans are fortunate in that one of the Web's best retro sites is dedicated to the machine. World of Spectrum (www.worldofspectrum.org) contains information on more than 12,500 games, with screenshots, links to reviews, and in the vast majority of cases, downloadable ROMs that can be played on modern platforms via emulation. Don't let the presence of ROMs deter you though – webmaster Martijn van der Heide actively seeks permission from publishers to offer the games freely on the site, and will remove games if requested by an IP owner.

World of Spectrum celebrated its 10th birthday at the end of the November, and we asked Martijn if he was planning to celebrate the anniversary. "Well I've added a smallish new section to the site, covering the Timex versions of the Spectrum," he replied in typically modest fashion. But what about the long-term future of WoS? "It will take several more years to update the databases so I hope to provide a more complete history over time. Other than that we are aiming to provide many more screenshots. And when more people have broadband Internet we'll shift to a more glossy, interactive environment." Sounds good, Martijn. Here's to the next 10 years…

World of Spectrum is not just the best Speccy site on the Web, but arguably the best retro resource full stop

PERFECT TEN GAMES

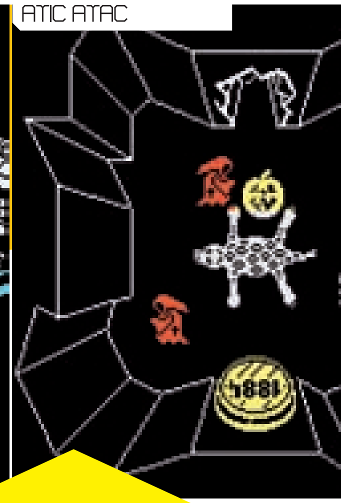




STARQUAKE



HEAD OVER HEELS



ATIC ATAC

STARQUAKE

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BUBBLEBUS SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** STEVE CROW

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** FIRELORD, WIZARD'S LAIR

Steve's Crow unbelievably addictive flick-screen platformer mixes pure playability with crisp sci-fi graphics and frantic puzzle solving. It's one of those games where every aspect has been polished to gleaming perfection; whether it's the mini-Mastercards that open any doors (geddit), the ability to summon temporary platforms beneath you at will, or the handy passworded teleporters that make light work of navigating the immense caverns. But it's the sheer speed of the thing that makes *Starquake* such an exhilarating experience on the Spectrum. Crow's devious mazes require serious cunning to traverse, and it's all kept at a feverish pace thanks to a constant supply of energy-sapping enemies. A must for every Spectrum aficionado, *Starquake* is pure 48k bliss.

ANT ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** QUICKSILVA

» **CREATED BY:** SANDY WHITE

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** I OF THE MASK, ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

Few games in the early Eighties were as atmospheric and downright terrifying as *Ant Attack*, the first real home video game to be viewed from an isometric perspective. The ghostly monotone graphics only served to intensify the desolation of the abandoned walled city of Antescher, and made the sudden appearance of the titular arthropods even more shocking. Typical games are spent tear-arsing around the tomb-like structures desperately following the green or red signals from your scanner to locate each lost soul. Sudden ant attacks are agile and persistent and require a dash to high ground or a well-aimed grenade to avoid. One of the few games to actually allow you to choose your sex, *Ant Attack* is still a prime example of a simple concept well implemented and burnt into the minds of a generation of gamers.

HEAD OVER HEELS

» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** NAMTIR RAIDERS, BATMAN, MATCHDAY I & II, MONSTER MAX

Pre 1987 Ritman and Drummond had toyed with the likes of the similarly isometric *Batman*. But it was with *Head Over Heels* that the duo truly achieved greatness. It's difficult to describe now the impact this game had when it was released; surpassing every other 3-D platformer in an instant with its relentless assault of clever ideas, kitsch graphics and surefooted game design. Ritman is a master of Rubik's Cube-style puzzles and nearly every room requires lateral thinking and more than a dash of fingertip dexterity. Dividing the *Head and Heels* character's abilities, so that they can only progress so far as separate entities and must literally join forces to complete the game, is a masterstroke, and typical of the ingenuity that seeps from the game's every pore.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** DENTON DESIGNS

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** ENIGMA FORCE, SHADOWFIRE, WHERE TIME STOOD STILL, COSMIC WARTOAD

In the year of the space shuttle Challenger disaster, Spectrum owners were treated to one of the finest isometric adventures ever to appear on Sir Clive's rubber marvel. *The Great Escape* is set in a Colditz-style POW camp during WWII, and the objective is to escape before your morale is crushed, and without alerting the guards and getting thrown into the cooler. What makes the game so compelling is the attention to detail and a real sense of confinement. The graphics are finely crafted, and clever little touches like the morale flag, the searchlights at night, the hidden tunnels, and the way you default to the camp routine if you stop playing, make the game a true classic. Just look at it.

ATIC ATAC

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** ULTIMATE

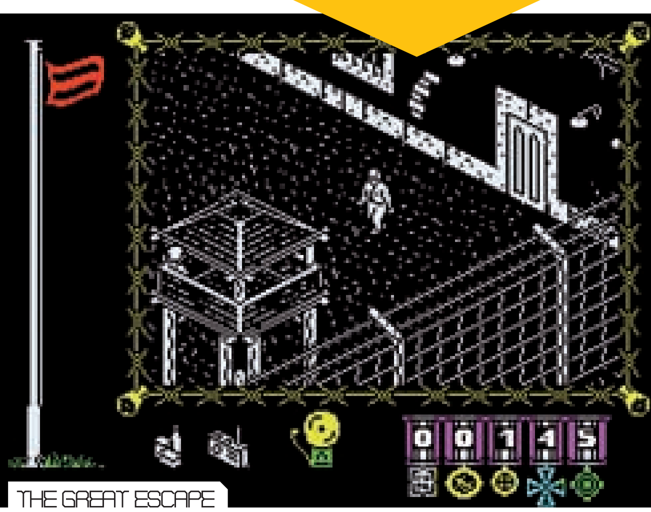
» **CREATED BY:** TIM STAMPER, CHRIS STAMPER

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** LUNAR JETMAN, SABRE WULF, ALIEN 8, GUNFRIGHT, KNIGHTLORE

No 'perfect ten' list for the Spectrum would be complete without a solid showing from the Stamper brothers and their superb Ultimate label. *Atic Atac* makes it into the list by a narrow margin (so many Ultimate games are outright classics) because it set the scene for Ultimate to dominate the Spectrum. Playing as Knight, Wizard or Serf, *Atic Atac* is an overhead perspective arcade adventure set over 200+ rooms in a gothic castle populated by endless minions, as well as Frankenstein, Quasimodo, the Mummy and of course Dracula. It's fast, it's challenging, and even today it provides hours of entertainment.



ANT ATTACK



THE GREAT ESCAPE

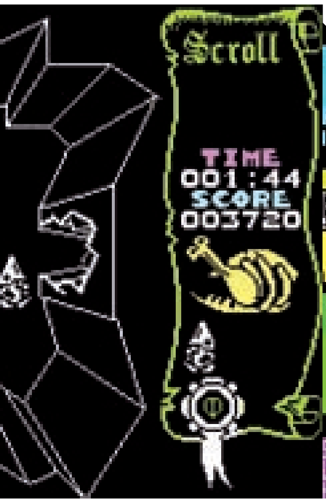


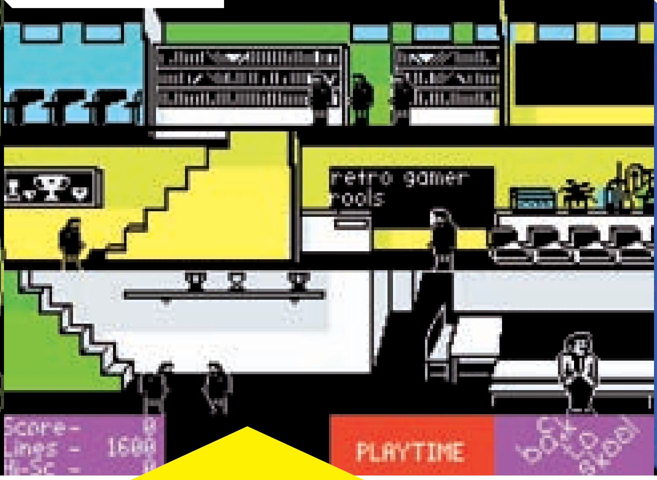
QUAZATRON



sinclair ZX Spectrum

A magnificent machine like the Speccy deserves a well thought-out and balanced appreciation of the ten best games. Now before you write in, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and of course open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on.





BACK TO SKOOL



REBEL STAR

QUAZATRON

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PUBLISHED BY:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS

» **CREATED BY:** STEVE TURNER

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SPACE WARS 3D, AVALON, DRAGONTORC, RANA RAMA, ZYNAPS

We're going out on a bit of a limb here, because Steve Turner's *Quazatron* is not generally considered one of the top ten Spectrum games, but hey, it's our list, right? So what if it stole C64 *Paradroid's* innovative 'grappling' system, and the lifts to other levels are kinda similar, *Quazatron* carves a niche for itself, and you can't deny the clever use of colour, the detail on the droids, and the *Marble Madness*-inspired gameplay. Where *Quazatron* scores highly is the player's desire to battle and strip the best parts from your fellow robots, boost their own abilities, and then wipe each level clean before descending to the next. A simply magnificent game.

BACK TO SKOOL

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICROSPHERE

» **CREATED BY:** DAVID REEDY

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SKOOL DAZE, WHEELIE, CONTACT SAM CRUISE

Together with the original *Skool Daze, Back to Skool* represents bedroom programming at its best – quintessentially British, packed with detail, and eminently playable, how could this game fail to appeal to its audience of rowdy teenagers? Allowing the player to individually name the cast of characters was Reedy's masterstroke because it meant your could personalise and relate to them instantly. What makes *Back to Skool* such a great Spectrum game though is the way it plays and the St Trinians-esque details, like riding the bike through the school, shooting water pistols, releasing the mouse to make the girls jump, and of course avoiding the cane of the sinister Mr Whacker. Fond, fond memories…

JET SET WILLY

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **PUBLISHED BY:** SOFTWARE PROJECTS

» **CREATED BY:** MATTHEW SMITH

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** MANIC MINER

The follow-up to *Manic Miner* is set in a sprawling mansion (bought with the profits from mining no doubt) and is both exciting and infuriating in equal measures. Gaming legend Matthew Smith showers you with extra lives to help you collect the 83 flashing objects – and you need them, as the difficulty level in rooms like the Banyan Tree, Out on a Limb, and the Forgotten Abbey is utterly insane! Smith's Python-inspired characters and unforgiving gameplay has sealed *JSW's* place in Spectrum history and spawned a hundreds clones, the best of which is probably Elite's *Rollercoaster.*

REBEL STAR

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD

» **CREATED BY:** JULIAN GOLLOP

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** CHAOS, LASER SQUAD, REBEL STAR 2, REBEL STAR RAIDERS

Just pipping Gollop's earlier masterpiece, *Chaos,* into our top ten, *Rebel Star* is a turn-based sci-fi strategy game in which you control either of two opposing forces in a moonbase battle (there was also a two player game on the flip-side of the tape and all for £1.99!). What seals *Rebel Star's* greatness is the pure strategy and cunning that must be employed to succeed; making the best of your forces' abilities and different armaments. Julian Gollop, where are you now?

ELITE

» **RELEASED:** 1985

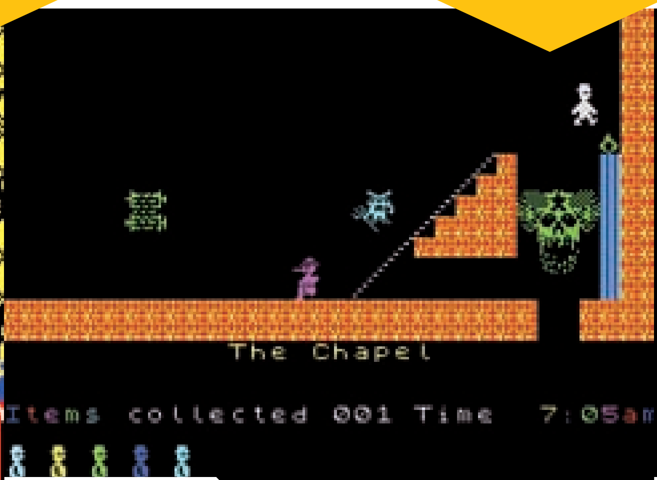
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD

» **CREATED BY:** TORUS

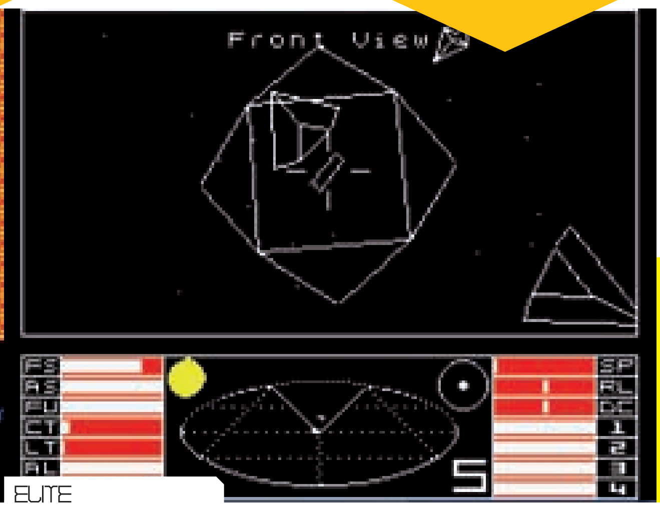
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** GYRON

No top ten could be complete without the obligatory conversion of the ultimate space trading game, and this Torus version remains faithful to Bell and Braben's original vision whilst at the same time adding some enhancements. That's if you could actually play the damn thing however, because *Elite* was the first ever game to utilise the Lenslock anti-piracy thingy, which managed to frustrate legitimate customers and pirates in almost equal measures. Fortunately *Elite* was worth it, with ultra-smooth and flicker-free frame rate, impressive magenta explosions, and for the 128k at least, three special missions.



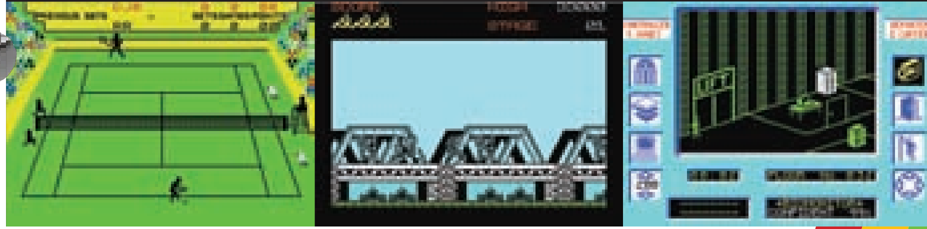


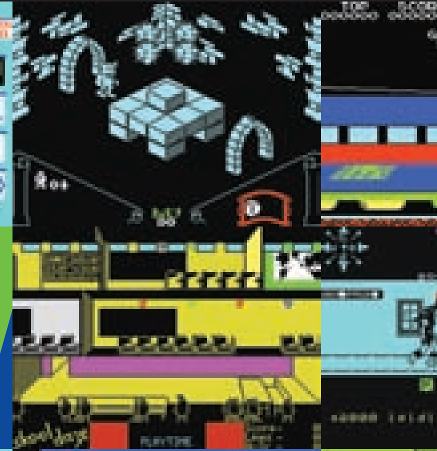
JET SET WILLY



ELITE





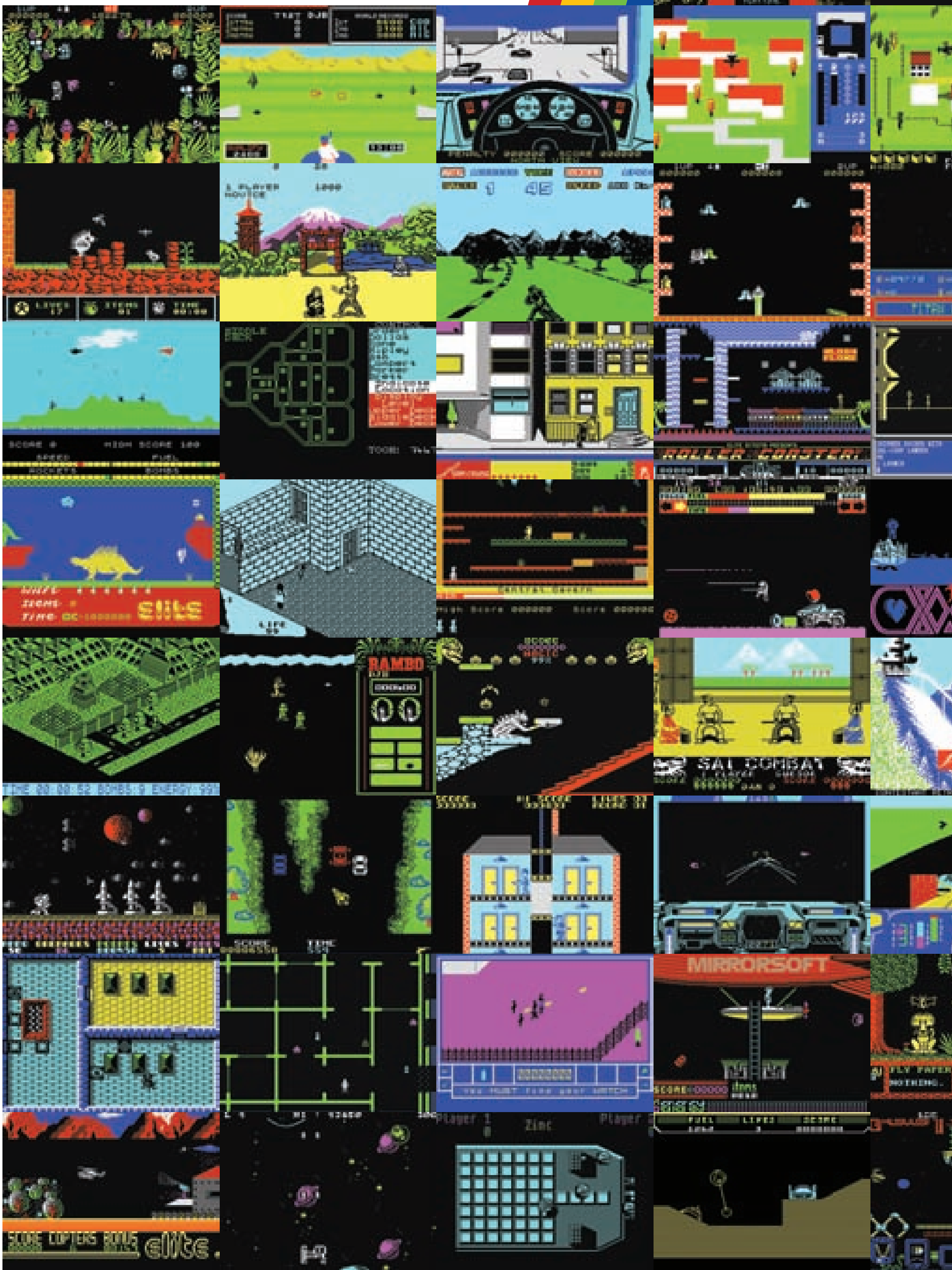


sinclair

ZX Spectrum and the rest...

With over twelve thousand Spectrum games in existence, its importance as the genesis of modern videogaming cannot be overstated, and many of the today's most successful developers cut their teeth on Sir Clive's finest.

01 MATCHPOINT
02 GREEN BERET
03 MAX HEADROOM
04 KNIGHT LORE
05 STOP THE EXPRESS
06 HIGHLANDER
07 STAR WARS
08 BARRY MCGUIGAN WORLD BOXING
09 DUNGEON ADVENTURE
10 LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
11 SKOOL DAZE
12 DUN DARACH
13 TAPPER
14 ROBIN 'O' THE WOOD
15 THE HOBBIT
16 CHUCKIE EGG
17 KNIGHT RIDER
18 SABRE WULF
19 HYPERSPORTS
20 TURBO ESPRIT
21 TLL
22 CYCLONE
23 TRAPDOOR
24 YIE AR KUNG FU
25 STARION
26 THEATRE EUROPE
27 COMMANDO
28 SPIKEY HAROLD
29 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
30 ENDURORACER
31 PSSST
32 CODENAME MAT
33 FEUD
34 3D DEATHCHASE
35 C5 CLIVE
36 GUNFRIGHT
37 THE SENTINEL
38 HARRIER ATTACK
39 ALIEN
40 CONTACT SAM CRUISE
41 ROLLERCOASTER
42 TAU CETI
43 MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG
44 CYBERNOID
45 TECHNICIAN TED
46 DAN DARE
47 KNIGHT TYME
48 KOKOTONI WILF
49 FAIRLIGHT
50 MANIC MINER
51 LUNAR JETMAN
52 THANATOS
53 WEST BANK
54 TRASHMAN
55 CHAOS
56 UNDERWURLDE
57 MIAMI VICE
58 GLIDER RIDER
59 RAMBO
60 CAULDRON II
61 SAI COMBAT
62 WINTER GAMES
63 INFILTRATOR
64 SABOTEUR
65 WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
66 BUBBLE BOBBLE
67 RENEGADE
68 EXOLON
69 SPY HUNTER
70 ELEVATOR ACTION
71 STARGLIDER
72 CHEQUERED FLAG
73 WHEELIE
74 AMAUROTE
75 DEATHSTAR INTERCEPTOR
76 JACK THE NIPPER
77 COBRA
78 RANARAMA
79 HALLS OF THE THINGS
80 NAME THE GAME COMPETITION. EMAIL US AT SCREENSHOTQUIZ@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK
81 DYNAMITE DAN II
82 THREE WEEKS IN PARADISE
83 DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON
84 BOBBY BEARING
85 JETPAC
86 ALIEN8
87 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
88 AIRWOLF
89 LIGHTFORCE
90 URIDIUM
91 THRUST
92 ZYNAPS
93 BATMAN
94 MATCHDAY
95 I OF THE MASK
96 STARSTRIKE II
97 BARBARIAN





SHOOT FIREBALLS
HIGHLANDER
The Factory Gates
GOLDEN DRAGON
DAN IS NOW IN SECTOR
BARBARIAN

THE CLASSIC GAME

THE CLASSIC GAME

SUPER METROID

More than a decade after its release, *Super Metroid* is still hailed as one of the greatest games of all time. It is guaranteed a position in lists of great games, and it continues to captivate the minds and imagination of gamers everywhere. While the series has continued many argue that the third instalment has never been bettered, and more importantly, that there is no need. *Super Metroid* is a perfect example of excellence in a still young medium; a benchmark which others try to follow. John Szczepaniak has the unenviable task of summarising precisely why this is.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** UP TO £20



From the instant the console is switched on, *Super Metroid* engages and communicates with the player. Ominous sound effects drift through the air as a room draped in shadow is panned across close-up, before scaling out to reveal the source of the noise surrounded by dead bodies. This is more than a title screen from which to launch into the game, this IS the game's opening scene that will soon be visited by newcomers. The save file and option menus are merely contrivances of a more conventional school of design.

The first play through is always the most magical, as one acclimatises to the game's many subtleties and commits to memory the layout and location of key areas and items. It also serves as a reminder of past adventures for our bounty hunter protagonist, Samus Aran. After an eerie voice proclaims the last Metroid to be in captivity and the galaxy at peace, quite awe-inspiring at the time, the game regales us with the events that lead to such a fortuitous situation, before presenting a major problem that will constitute the quest ahead. It also introduces the key characters in the tale, the longstanding adversary Mother Brain, and also the titular Metroid creatures. In recapping the second game, it explains how a Metroid comes to regard Samus as its mother.

All this is important, since the magnitude of *Super Metroid* is not generated in and of itself, but also through an epic trilogy that took years to be fully realised. It symbolises the traditional three act structure found in most narratives, with the third act detailing the overcoming of said problem and grand finale to the sequence of events.

With the scene set players are finally granted control over the game's prelude, which will prove indicative of the techniques later used to generate atmosphere, and emotion in the player. The Ceres research colony is quiet, seemingly abandoned. After wandering the empty corridors the player finally reaches a familiar scene, the control room shown earlier at the title screen. Except, while the dead bodies remain, the Metroid

larva is missing. This initial scene expertly generates tension in newcomers, and it shows how *Super Metroid* manages to create strong emotions with very little. Simply through the privation of anticipated elements.

The corridor soon leads to a hopeless fight against Ridley, Mother Brain's second in command and another of Samus' long standing opponents. Despite being impossible to win, this fight is incredibly important. In a way the game makes a promise to the player with this scene, a promise of things to come and of eventual victory. Samus WILL grow stronger though her coming conquests, strong enough even to defeat Ridley, and she will also be re-united with the object of her desire, the Metroid larva. It serves as a dangling carrot for those with low attention spans, a hint of what lies at the end of the road and a reason to continue.

When Samus' gunship lands on the surface of Zebes, save for a rainstorm, all is quiet much like the Ceres space station. But like previously, it is this unnatural silence that unnerves the player. The feeling is heightened whilst exploring the underground cavern network, and you stumble across the ruined and mist shrouded previous base of Mother Brain. It is familiar surroundings, being the setting of the battle at the end of the first Metroid game. By having the player retread these final steps, in the hope that they've played the previous games and so make the connection, the game expertly communicates with the player and brings about a rush of nostalgia. From here and with the acquisition of the Morph Ball, again the player is tricked. Having been lulled by the silence into a sense of security, suddenly an alarm sounds and the planet comes to life. The enemy knows their inner sanctuary has been invaded, and now the fight for success really begins.

"NINTENDO LEFT NOTHING TO CHANCE; EVERYTHING IS FINISHED WITH A STARTLING PRECISION THAT LEAVES NO ROUGH EDGES"

AESTHETICALLY ASTOUNDING

Even in the early stages of the game, there is painstaking attention to detail. The most notable, and something that should be highly commended, is that Samus' display sprite has been drawn correctly for both left and right animations. Face to the left and you will see her left arm braced against the cannon on her right. But face to the right and her cannon arm will instead be visible, with her left hand casually resting on top. This has been done for each of her actions, be it running, jumping, falling, or simply standing and breathing. At no point does she become ambidextrous. This accurate drawing of the sprites is even more important when you consider that very few other 2D games in either the 16-bit or 32-bit generation even bothered to do such a thing.

Beyond this the water splashes beneath Samus' feet, small insects flee in fear as someone approaches, and light is cast by flying glow-in-the-dark enemies. Everything is graced by multiple frames of animation, while both the quality and quantity of transparency effects is abundant. Mist, rain, several varieties of water, heat rippling; all of it generates a visual richness unlike any other.

The fact that the development team actually took the time to address such points shows clearly that much effort was put into each and every facet of the game. Nintendo left nothing to chance; everything is finished with a startling precision that leaves no rough edges. Not only does it push the hardware to the limit, but also arguably one could say, it is utterly perfect in what it visually attempts.

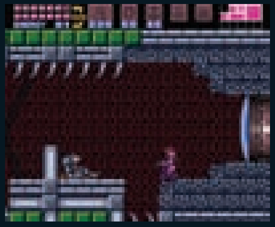
But such perfection is not limited merely to a few spares levels, rather it graces a wide range of incredibly diverse environments. The lush jungles of Brinstar contrast wildly against the submerged world of Meridia and the intense heat of Norfair's ruins. Though little compares to the haunting desolation of the Wrecked Ship, a vessel that crashed before recorded memory and piloted by



» Lo! Behold, the gateway to Tourian and the final confrontation



» Deep below, in caverns filled with white pollen, there resides both friend and foe.



» This unknown and fallen warrior is an enigma that persists even today.

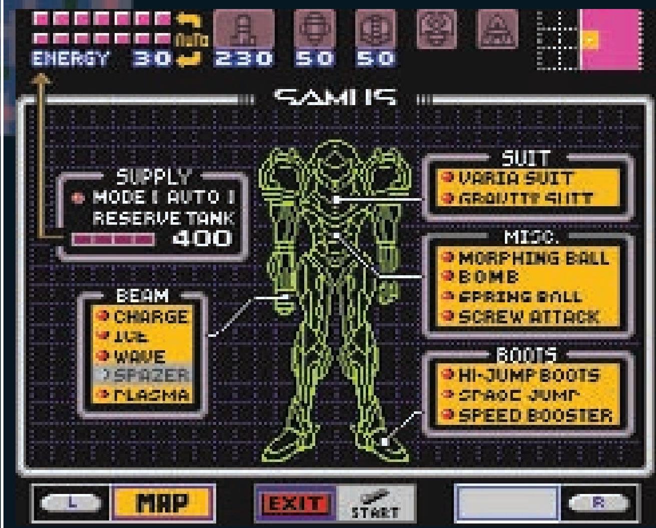


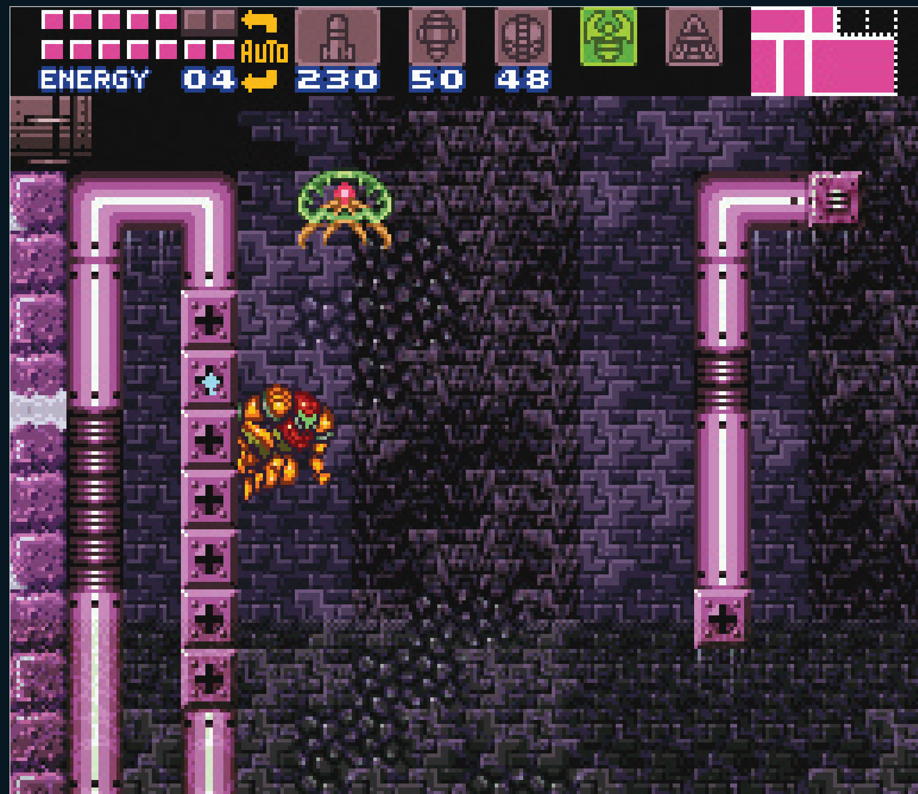
THE CLASSIC GAME

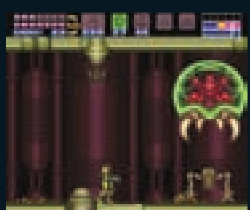
SUPER METROID

"SCORE ATTACK"

It's ironic that a title, which prides itself on delivering an ethereal experience unlike any other, should be used so extensively as a title for high scores. There is of course no official scoring beyond the percentage of items acquired and length of time the game has been played, but this is enough for people to test their skills. The official record for perfect game completion is under an hour (less if emulators are used), while many practice sequence breaking and attempt to challenge the massive bosses with as little equipment as possible (20% or less is fairly good). The fact that players go to such lengths, is a testament to the quality and lingering allure of *Super Metroid*. It is simply not enough to play and experience it and like all good things it leaves a yearning for more, and so people develop alternative methods to indulge in it.







» The Metroid larva from SR-388, now grown, seeks its surrogate mother.

an unknown race. Despite the unreal nature of such alien worlds, there is surprisingly a believable organic realism to everything (see Flora and Fauna). Far more so, than many modern titles which boast otherwise.

Not only the visuals have such ambience, the audio too is of amazing quality. Heard within are some of the most beautiful and unforgettable piano pieces to be formed by the Sony music chip at the heart of the SNES. At other times the music feels heavily influenced by Carmina Burana, with some very evocative chanting taking place in the deeper caverns. Even today gamers attest to hairs standing up on the back of their necks at hearing the music again.

DISTINCTIVE DESIGNS

Super Metroid, while astounding players with lush aesthetics, is remembered best for its superb sense of design and pacing. At its most basic it involves traversing the maze-like caverns in a zigzag formation, encountering impassable obstacles and then acquiring an item that allows further progress, and then repeating the process. If movement in one direction is halted, the only option is to go back testing out any recently gained tools. Overlaid onto this is a degree of non-linearity that begs to be manipulated; a gaming experience that encourages people to attempt sequence breaking (see Score Attack).

This design structure, of slowly building power by obtaining further items, is like a guerrilla war. For every missile tank gained, you grow stronger and the Space Pirates grow weaker. The sense of growth is tangible, and makes progression very satisfying. New items open up new areas and there is a very real excitement to be had, racing back to the first yellow door encountered in order to test a recently attained Power Bomb. These extra weapons also aid in rending the game's massive screen-filling bosses unto dust.

Thankfully the game doesn't guide or hold hands during exploration, but instead shows a great deal of trust in the player. It gives no gameplay or narrative explanations; allowing players to make their own decisions. Secret hidden passages riddle the many hallways and need to be actively searched for, while the precise nature of things such as the Wrecked Ship or mysterious body outside Kraid's room are never explained. Like the best horror films which never accurately show the source of malevolence, *Super Metroid's* strength lies in the mysterious way it intentionally leaves questions unanswered and forces your imagination to fill in the blanks. Something later iterations sadly never grasped.

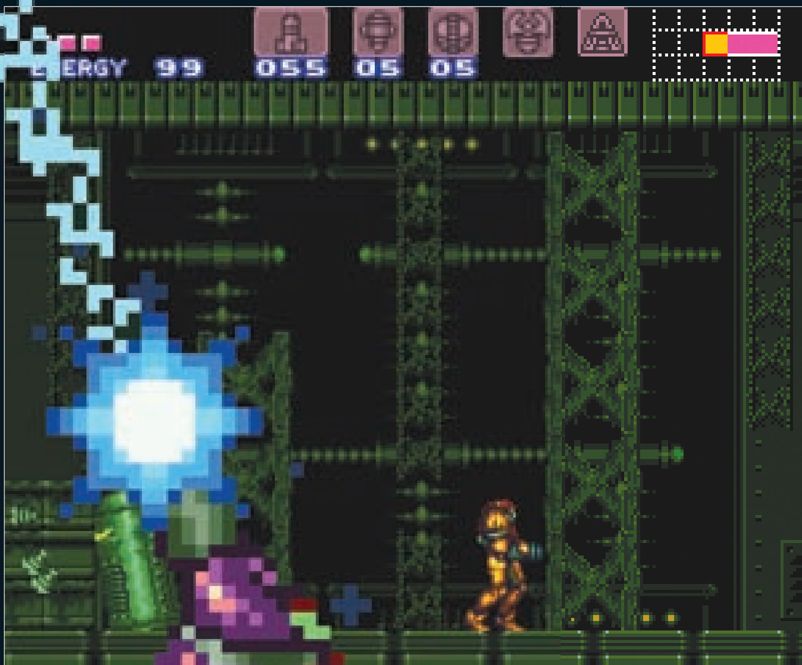
It is poignant that one of the key creative minds behind the Metroid titles, Gunpei Yokoi, is now deceased, forever sealing the truths behind any mysteries.



THEY SAID:

"CONTROL ALWAYS FEELS SO NATURAL; NINTENDO HAS ENGINEERED THE PLAYABILITY WITH SUCH REFINEMENT AND FINESSE THAT YOU'LL NEVER FIND YOURSELF BLAMING THE GAME"

SUPER PLAY



» It has been many centuries since any travellers of space wandered these now desolate corridors.

In a fitting way, it also puts to rest the true Metroid trilogy that Super finished off. Another creative mind behind the games, Yoshio Sakamoto, has taken further instalments in strange new directions, which many argue dilutes the essence so perfectly captured in the third instalment. Not even Nintendo can better the bar that it had already raised so high.

Unsurprisingly, *Super Metroid* has also proved highly influential. The sense of pacing, the way it never felt forced and encouraged exploration, the diversity of items, it accomplished many things with seeming ease. It also generated several pretenders. Unknown to many, a company called Radical Entertainment developed a 3D *Metroid* clone for the PS1 called *The Divide: Enemies Within*. In interviews they stated that they were huge fans of *Super Metroid*, and the influence is clearly visible. The finest of all games that borrows from Nintendo's seminal classic though, has to be Konami's *Symphony of the Night* (and it's not so spectacular sequels) which directly copied the concept of maze-like maps and progressive item collection. There are other more blatant copies, such as several fan remakes and pseudo-sequels done with GameMaker, though it has to be said that few even come close to the output of big companies. There may be imitators, but none are like or can hope to match *Super Metroid*.

It is a game that is unlikely to be ever made again, especially with the current obsession with 3D. Instead it will continue to stand in the hallway of timeless classics, idolised by gamers and generations to come, perhaps even used as THE textbook example of great games design from that era.





"FLORA AND FAUNA"

Another one of the elements that makes *Metroid 3* so distinctly special, is the way it convinces the player of just how real the living breathing ecosystem they inhabit is. Something that later instalments failed to understand entirely. Piles of dung litter the ground below creatures fixed to the ceiling, whereas elsewhere docile gastropods emerge from clear cocoons and proceed to wander aimlessly. It's important to mention that not all creatures encountered are hostile. Playful Etecoons show Samus how to wall jump, while the mother Dachora bird demonstrates the Speed Booster technique; considering how modern titles are weighed down with obtrusive tutorials, Nintendo's technique proves exceedingly elegant. But perhaps the most distinctive example of the environment is the aquatic mother turtle guarding her brood. Simple entry of the chamber proves fruitless, with baby turtles foraging and the parent slumbering. Only when the nest is disturbed, does the mother awaken before attempting to mercilessly pulverise Samus. These elements represent a recurring maternal theme, from the very name of Mother Brain, to several local creatures that are with offspring, even to the fact that Samus herself is female. Such deep post-modern undertones in a title this age is astounding.



» Samus enveloped in a sphere of light, her secret technique to recharge energy.

MORE METROID

OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:

Metroid
Metroid II
Metroid Fusion
Metroid: Zero Mission
Metroid Prime
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
Metroid Prime Hunters
Smash Bros
Smash Bros Melee
Metroid Prime Pinball



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FIRE EMBLEM
NES [1990]

PAPER MARIO
N64 [2000]

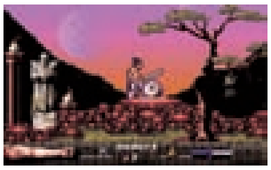
ADVANCE WARS: DUEL STRIKE
NDS [2005]



Whatever Happened To...

FIRST SAMURAI

IN THE KNOW



- » **DEVELOPER** VIVID IMAGE
- » **PUBLISHER** IMAGE WORKS, KEMCO (SNES VERSION)
- » **PLATFORM** AMIGA, ATARI ST, C64, PC, SNES
- » **YEAR** 1991-93

Gamers of a certain age will remember *First Samurai*, an exuberant and positively potty game that placed a funky little samurai in a kaleidoscopic world. Playing through it now you realise that it could only have been developed by a bunch of people who were more than a little familiar with the kinds of higher states of consciousness created by imbibing the 'erb.

Legend has it that it was pulled from the shelves after only a week (probably thanks to Mirrosoft, the company responsible for distributing it, going into receivership), but if you were old enough to clasp a Konix joystick or were jammy enough to own an Amiga or ST you would have almost certainly 'acquired' this by fair means or foul.

Universally lauded for its innovation, colour and flair, hopes remained high that a sequel would follow and two years later it duly did. The originally titled *Second Samurai* probably hit the shelves too late in the Amiga's life to have the same impact as the original, leaving many unaware of its existence but still clamouring for more psychedelic sword-wielding action. Suffice to say, it was everything that the original was, and the two-player mode was an added delight.



» You could always guarantee that you would lose your sword at the very moment that you needed it the most

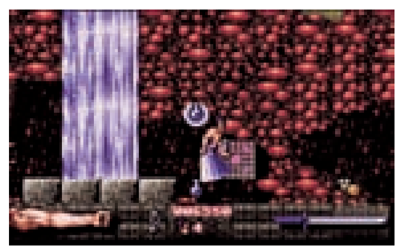
> "IN A WORLD WHERE LOST VIKINGS HAS BEEN PORTED FROM THE SNES TO THE GBA IT SEEMS CRIMINAL THAT SUCH A CLASSIC BRITISH GAME HAS BEEN SO CRUELLY OVERLOOKED"



» Hunting down the Demon King would require an awful lot of skill and patience, as the Samurai has to work his way through some very challlenging levels

Years later, developer Mev Dinc hinted that he was thinking of resurrecting the saga on the N64, having just finish work on the futuristic *Mario Kart*-u-like, *S.C.A.R.S.* This was an unexpected bonus for both fans of the series and the N64's anorexic release schedule and *First Samurai 64* was added to release schedules in magazines up and down the land. We waited for the first batch of screenshots and expected previews but that's as far as it went, as it pulled a 'Keyser Soze' and disappeared.

With Raff Cecco having quietly retired into semi-obscurity and Mev Dinc unlikely to return now that Vivid Image is no more, it looks likely that we have seen the last of the oriental swordsman. However, in a world where *Lost Vikings* has been ported from the SNES to the GBA it seems criminal that such a classic British game has been so cruelly overlooked.



WE KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO...

SHADOW OF THE BEAST
Developer: Reflections
Publisher: Psygnosis
Platform: Atari Lynx, Master System, CPC, Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Amiga CD32, Mega Drive, SNES, TG16, FM-Towns Marty
Year: 1989



TURRICAN
Developer: Probe, Factor 5
Publisher: Rainbow Arts
Platform: CPC, Spectrum, C64, Amiga, ST
Year: 1989-1990



STRIDER
Developer: Capcom/Tiertex (Concersions)
Publisher: Capcom
Platform: Arcade, Amiga, Atari ST, C64, PC, SNES
Year: 1989

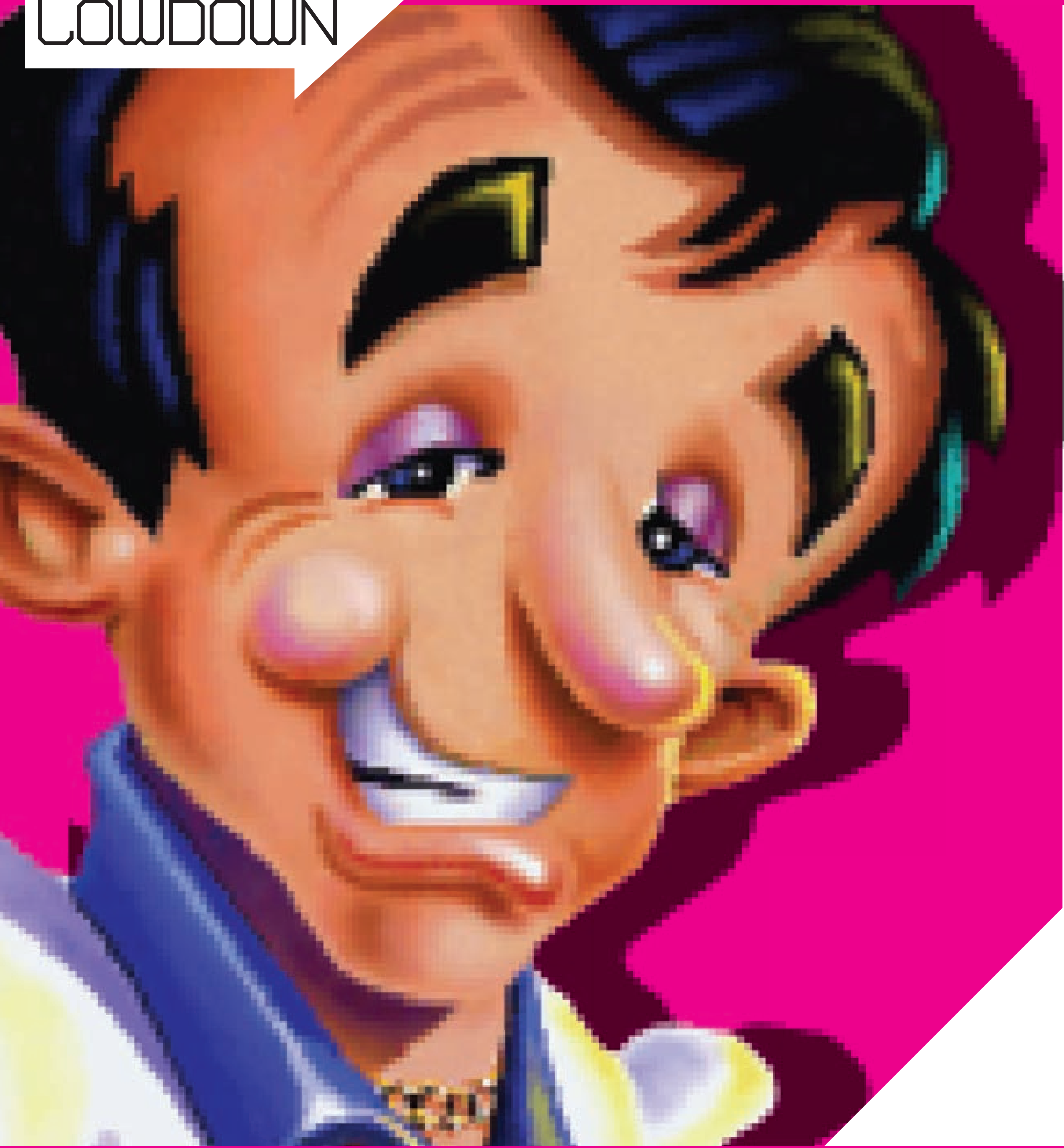


SHOGUN
Developer: Mastertronic
Publisher: Mastertronic
Platform: CPC, C-64, Spectrum
Year: 1986



eMag

THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

Leisure Suit Larry

COMPUTER GAMES HAVE INTRODUCED MANY FAMOUS CHARACTERS THAT HAVE KNOWN CAREERS SO PREVALENT AS TO BECOME THE ENVY OF THE BIGGEST HOLLYWOOD STARS. BUT THERE WAS ONE, WHO DESPITE MASSIVE INDUSTRY ACCLAIM AND HYSTERICAL FANDOM NEVER EVEN HAD HIS PICTURE ON A LUNCHBOX WITH MATCHING INTEGRAL FLASK. HIS NAME WAS LARRY LAFFER, BUT HIS FRIENDS KNEW HIM AS 'LEISURE SUIT LARRY'. RETRO GAMER TAKES A LOOK AT THE PHENOMENON OF THE SUIT AND TALKS TO THE MAN BEHIND HIM, WHO MADE IT HIS LIFE'S WORK TO HUMILIATE AND TORTURE HIS FINEST CREATION

LEISURE SUIT LOWE

Al Lowe is known to introduce himself as 'being born a poor black child in Gumbo, Missouri'. A fitting opener for this middle class white man from St Louis, as it not only establishes him as the wayward, prankster comedian that he is, but gives an insight into his humour that would otherwise be difficult to express.

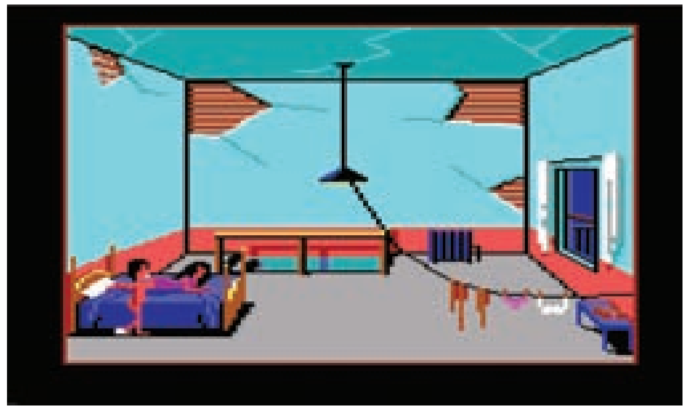
"I was working as a secondary school music teacher in '78, and there was a DEC PDP 1170 computer available at the district office, but no one ever really used it, except maybe the accounts department", said Lowe when questioned about his introduction to the world of computers. "I think it had about a megabyte of RAM, but that was shared between 32 users so you probably got around 16k. Anyway, I spoke to the guy in charge of it one lunchtime, and he told me he was always looking for ways to build up his department and gave me a book on basic, which I took home and read cover to cover. It really wasn't that difficult, but then I did have a definite goal in





"I CAN'T SEE WHERE THIS FUNDAMENTAL IDEA THAT WHEN PEOPLE SIT IN FRONT OF A COMPUTER, OR A GAME CONSOLE FOR THAT MATTER, THEY SUDDENLY HAVE NO SENSE OF HUMOUR! I THINK IT'S STILL AN UNTAPPED MARKET BUT NOBODY'S GOT THE GUTS TO GO TRY IT."

AL LOWE



» A sarcastic comment that Softporn "should be wearing a leisure suit" gave birth to the libidinous Larry

mind and knew exactly what I wanted to achieve, what the input should be and what the output should be. I wanted a program to score a marching band contest!"

Al was publishing his software from home and selling it door to door. After a chance encounter with an educational software fair, he realised the state of 'edutainment' was pitiful and no comparison to his own home brewed games. The market was essentially wide open.

"My wife and I were producing these fold over pieces of cardboard and literally stuffed the floppies into little plastic baggies," recalls Lowe. "We took them to an educational computer show and they sold really well! Then we looked at Apple Fest, which turned out to be the last Apple Fest, and for their smallest stall of ten by ten feet it was going to cost a months salary! We more than made back our money, and we also got to meet every publisher there was for the Apple II. They all said 'oh you don't want to be a publisher. Be a designer and let us do the dirty work!'

I realised they were probably right, because cutting out cardboard inlays, copying disks and addressing boxes was no fun, I just wanted to concentrate on making more games."

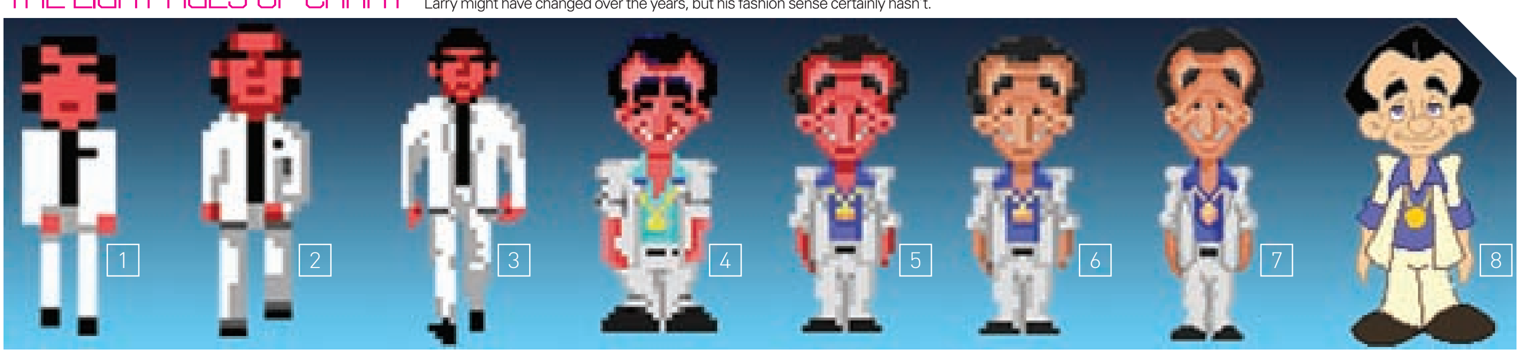
Despite making plenty of cash, the biggest benefit of Lowe's stall at Apple Fest was that it enabled him to catch the eye of Sierra On-Line founders Ken and Roberta Williams. Lowe's work immediately caught Williams' eye because it was so similar to his early Sierra work. "Ken Williams walks past our booth and shouts 'Hey 'Berta! Come and look. These games look exactly like yours', which I took as very high praise. I'm not sure she took it that way, but I certainly did!

Sierra was the largest advertiser at the time and was number one in many fields, but they didn't have any educational software. They said they'd take mine, and since Sierra was only 45 minutes from my house, they took me to head up their educational department. So for the remainder of that school year I worked full time and spent my evenings writing software for Sierra."

At the same time, Texas Instruments had been making immense investments in the home

THE EIGHT AGES OF LARRY

Larry might have changed over the years, but his fashion sense certainly hasn't.



1: Never mind the pixels, that's one snappy suit Larry's sporting

2: Larry's second incarnation sees his face becoming more defined

3: He's gained a little bit of muscle now, and actually looks like he could pull

4: Larry Laffer's transformartion into a total loser is almost complete

5: The medallion and shoes are smaller, but he's sporting one hell of a tan

6: Apart from the lack of tan we couldn't see any difference. Can you?

7: The new, leaner Larry, complete with upgraded medallion of love

8: Larry's final incarnation – how could any girl not fall in love with that?



SOFTPORN
Infamy came when Time Magazine featured *Softporn Adventure* prominently in it's first ever computer column. The hot tub featured in the picture actually belonged to Ken and Roberta Williams, and if you need proof, that's Roberta herself on the right hand side of the tub. The girl in the middle was the wife of Bob Davis (a game designer working at On-Line Systems), on the left was a shipping clerk from the company and the suave waiter looking churlish over his tray of plonk was from a nearby restaurant. Keep it local was the online motto.

entertainment industry, only to have second thoughts at the eleventh hour… "That same Apple Fest brought the news that Texas Instruments were pulling out of the market," recalls Lowe. "It had spent millions upon millions buying up the rights to all Mattel products (like Barbie and such), all Disney characters plus a further million dollars hiring Bill Cosby to be their spokesman.

Well, Ken ended up buying the rights for a song from TI, rather than Disney.

So Sierra fulfilled the rest of TI's contract and for a year or so, and as strange as it seems, I was Walt Disney software. At first the Disney franchises looked really lucrative; but it only turned out to be lucrative for the Mouse! The Disney lawyers had written this contract so that Disney received all the actual money and we effectively worked for nothing. Anyway, when it came time to renew, they wanted even more money and we just said, 'Screw you. Our games are better and make more money.'"

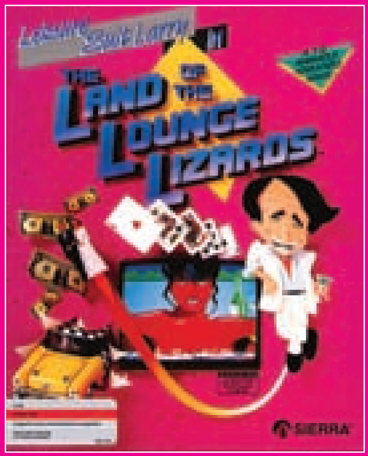
SOFTPORN, HARD GAMES

Sierra On-Line had been producing a steady stream of high quality adventure games for several years, including 1981's somewhat risqué text based romp, *Softporn Adventure*.

The game's objective was to prowl through the city of Lost Vagueness and attempt to seduce three women in one night, a task requiring money (am I right, fellas?) obtainable by gambling on the available slot machines, black jack tables and various casino based frivolities.

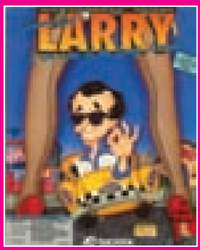
"It was a huge seller," explains Lowe. "You've got to understand how popular *Softporn* was. When I

Larry games rundown!



LEISURE SUIT LARRY I

IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS 1987

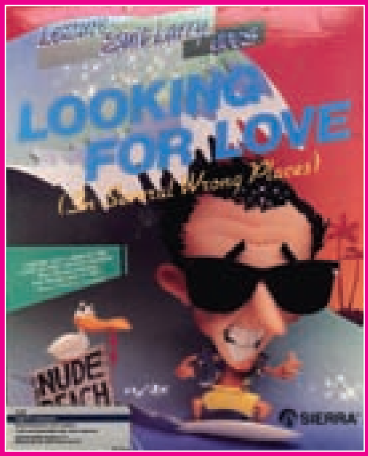


Sierra's revolutionary romp begins with our hero on the streets of Lost Wages with the firm notion of ridding himself of his 40-year-old virginity.

The Suit must obtain the relevant equipment for the evenings prospective entertainment, find his way past the hefty pimp in Lefty's Bar and achieve his wayward goal with the resident bike.

Being the socially conscious gent that he is, Al Lowe incorporated a safe sex policy into his lengthy sub-routines, so just as the Knight must find 'the key' to enter 'the door' in standard adventures, Larry must acquire a condom to enter … well, you know.

Upon completion of his first coital commission, Larry realises the shallowness of such carnal conquest and endeavours to hit the seedy streets once more in search of true love.



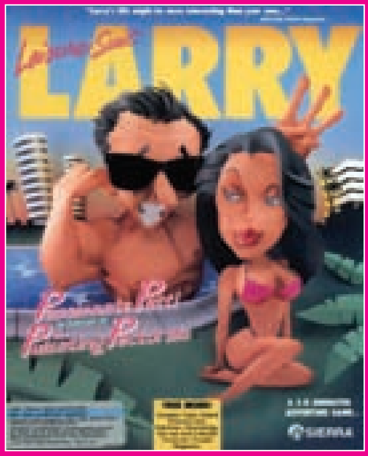
LEISURE SUIT LARRY 2

LOOKING FOR LOVE (IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES) 1989

Finding his way onto a 'Blind Date' type TV game show, the ineloquence of the lucky lady (as Cilla would say) leads to Larry being chosen to accompany her on a cruise aboard the USS Love Tub. A celebratory session on the lottery and he's a millionaire, ready to find the perfect haircut followed by the perfect woman. Perfect.

Even though the plot intertwines death defying escapes, sultry and devious femme fatales, villainous KGB agents and nudist beaches, this is ultimately a game making fun of Larry's hair.

Producing a game in such bluenose times, Al took the opportunity to develop the storylines and personalities that ultimately gave Larry Laffer the depth of character to appear in another four successful features.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY 3

PASSIONATE PATTI IN SEARCH OF THE PULSATING PECTORALS 1989

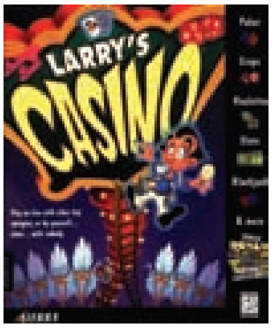
Initially, Al had the notion of producing a trilogy, and episode three wrapped up Larry's life quite nicely.

Alongside the usual jumping-through-hoops approach to scoring with chicks, the player is assailed by the many wonderful visions of Al Lowe's wicked sense of humour: feral pigs, cross dressing action, lesbian cannibal Amazonians, marijuana (for making hemp rope of course) and pixelated nudity.

The series culminates with Larry and Patti 'falling' out of the game and into Sierra On-Line's car park (in a delicious homage to *Blazing Saddles*) where they meet up with none other than Roberta Williams. Larry then takes to the computer to create games based on his own bizarre story. The life and loves of Leisure Suit Larry are brought full circle.

A difficult but hilarious romp; just as we'd come to expect from big Al, bringing the Larry Laffer saga to a gratifying climax.





LARRY'S CASINO (1998)
Not quite the online adventure game Al Lowe had always wanted, this was a half way house for fans to see what it was like playing over the internet and to experience a distinctly Larry-esque world.
Although the game could be played offline, the real point was to get connected, chat and have light-hearted simulated sex with other gamblers. Players could pull faces and show suggestive emotion on the custom character faces they created before dialling up. All the multi-player games had the characters seated in a hot tub (as per the cover of *Softporn Adventure*) and with the only employee at the casino being Larry Laffer, the air about the whole thing was distinctly leisure suited.

"WHEN KEN ASKED ME IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I COULD DO WITH IT, I THOUGHT THE PUZZLES WERE PRETTY GOOD AND SIMPLY RIPPED THEM OFF. WHEN I LOOK BACK NOW, I WISH I'D SPENT MORE TIME REWRITING THE PUZZLES, I MEAN, THE PILLS ON THE WINDOW LEDGE? WHAT THE HELL WAS I THINKING?"
AL LOWE

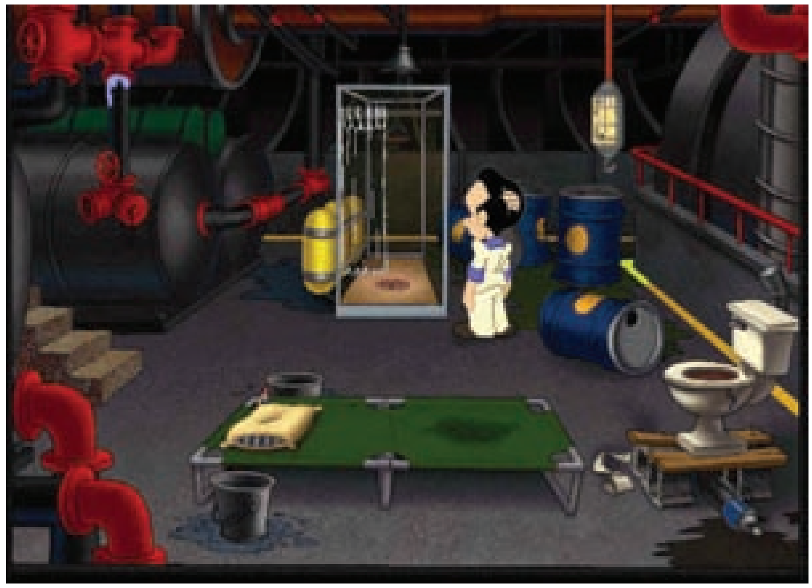
bought my Apple II everyone I knew had a copy of *Softporn*. Most of them didn't pay for it, but everybody had it. There was zero humour in it, and it wasn't that well written, but Chuck Benton was a programmer after all. The fact that it sold was amazing to him and it didn't go unnoticed by Ken either…"

Deciding that he'd like to see a graphical redesign of *Softporn Adventure*, Williams gave Lowe free reign to create the game of his career. As development began, Lowe soon realised that any attempt to approach a *Softporn* remake with a serious storyline would come across as outdated and tawdry, so he decided a comical tactic based around a central character would lend the game more credibility.

"When Ken asked me if there was anything I could do with it, I thought the puzzles were pretty good and simply ripped them off," Lowe confirms. "When I look back now, I wish I'd spent more time rewriting the puzzles, I mean, the pills on the window ledge? What the hell was I thinking? Let's just claim that I was going for a bit of surrealism when you write up the article."

Oops.

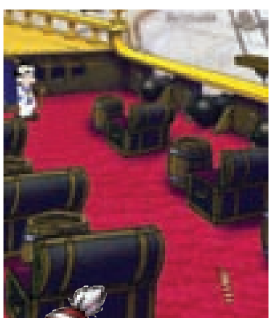
Early on, Lowe had commented that *Softporn* was so out of date it should be wearing a leisure suit, a remark that planted an impious seed of creativity into the discount whore of his brilliant humour. This illegitimate result of a gifted programmer and a salacious comedian's unprotected congress was born as the iniquitous, yet lovable Polyester Prince of Prurience, Larry Laffer. Unlike other videogame heroes of the time, Larry was not a typical strong, moral epitome of human excellence, but rather a desperate, libidinous, 40-year-old loser. *Leisure Suit Larry: In the Land of the Lounge Lizards* was released in June 1987 to the worst initial sales Sierra On-Line had ever seen. With only 2000 units selling in its first month, it looked set to realise the same pitiable fate in sales as its main character had in love.

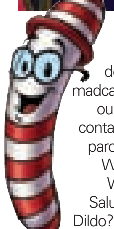


» Lowe worked on *Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love for Sail* with 13 other members of staff. In this case the number was actually lucky

Rumours began spreading about the content of this 'adult' game and the peculiar fact that it wasn't available from Radio Shack – whose president was a puritan Baptist with intensely sectarian views – made sales consistently double every month for a year.

By the beginning of '88, *Leisure Suit Larry* had quietly made it to number one, and for one wonderful week in July, two other games Al had been working on in an attempt to redeem himself joined Larry on the top ten chart list, firmly establishing Al Lowe as the right dude for the gig. Al designed Leisure Suit Larry in such a way that interaction with its characters and plot lines required a bar room mentality, rather than the logical, analytical approach that fans of the adventure genre usually employed. The personalities that surrounded Larry were considerably more human than previously seen on a computer: drunks, cheats, thugs, gold diggers – they were all there waiting to make Larry's life as difficult as possible. Gamers have always gravitated toward new, unusual experiences and as the *Leisure Suit Larry ball* started rolling, the fan base became enormous. In 1987, Al's creation won a much coveted Software Publishers Association 'Codie' for best adventure game, and has appeared in such prestigious media as The New York Times, Rolling Stone Magazine and Playboy (and now Retro Gamer, of course).





WHERE'S DILDO?
Leisure Suit Larry 7, despite being packed full of madcap methods for humiliating our prurient protagonist, also contained a naughty side game parodying the children's book, Where's Waldo? (known as Where's Wally? in the UK). Salubriously entitled 'Where's Dildo?' players won extra bonus points by uncovering the 32 happy faced, stripy dildos secreted about the ship. This idea was snuck in at the last minute after the game had been passed by quality control. 32 'dos were all they had time to insert before it was shipped. Cheeky!

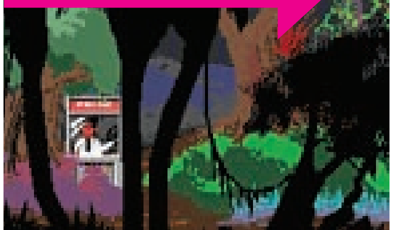


» *Leisure Suit Larry 5* was the second game in the series to give you control of two characters: Larry Laffer and the sultry Patti

WILL LARRY EVER COME AGAIN?

Vivendi recently released an all-new 3D Larry (Magna Cum Laude) game featuring the college high jinks of The Suit's nephew. Despite the massive fan base available, the new game has met with limited success and reviews have not been kind. Surprisingly, Lowe had no creative input into the game. "I've always felt like I've lived a charmed life," he explains without a hint of regret. "I always seem to find a parking spot near the front door, I've got a wife who's wonderful to live with and puts up with

DO YOU
REMEMBER WHEN…

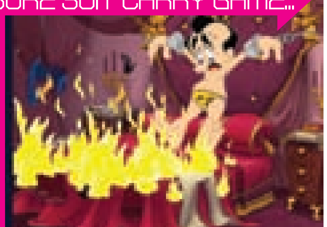


LARRY MADE A DIRTY PHONE CALL
Should the player answer the pay phone outside Quickie Mart, the National Hotline Sex Survey asks some rather revealing questions, and answers are purely between you and your conscience. A second phone call from a salacious stranger then offers a package deal of remarkably recognisable fantasies tailored to the individual player!

all my idiosyncrasies, I've got two great children and, you know, thank God my negotiations with Vivendi fell through. I said 'I'm literally ten minutes away from your offices. Anytime you want to talk about it, give me a call and I can be there in ten minutes – I sit at home all day, I'm retired!' I don't know if they were insincere or unable to go that way or whatever. I never heard back from them. I'm sorry, but I just thought it was an embarrassing game and to be honest, I'm happy that I wasn't involved."

Al now spends the pretty much all of his spare time maintaining his comedy website (www.allowe.com), playing golf, playing the saxophone in his jazz band and enjoying spending quality time with the family. While home industries continue to reproduce updates of old classics, Al has yet to be tempted by any one of the dozens of offers he's had to get back into the games development saddle. "I suppose the only 'unless' would be if I could find a producer willing to do it in a really first class, professional way, and with a sense of humour. I could be tempted out of retirement for that, sure. Smart people in the industry create what gamers want. People love to laugh at a movie screen and a TV screen, so I can't see where this fundamental idea that when people sit in front of a computer, or a game console for that matter, they suddenly have no sense of humour! I think it's still an untapped market but nobody's got the guts to go try it."

IF YOU PLAY ONE LEISURE SUIT LARRY GAME…
PLAY THIS…



LARRY'S BIGGEST PART
I'm half-tempted to say the original is the best, as it now qualifies for a Leisure Suit of its own, but LSL7 'Love For Sail' has to win out. Replete with ridiculous, embarrassing and hilarious situations for the amorous 'alf-wit, you also get hunt for dildos, take an acid trip and play horseshoes. Yeah, baby!

Larry games rundown!

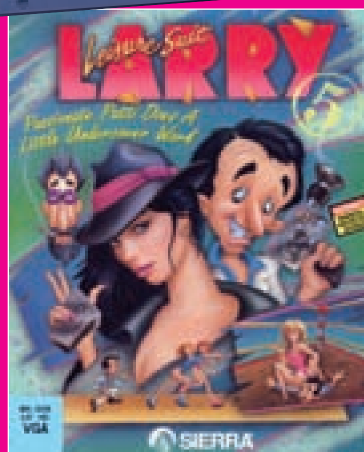


LEISURE SUIT LARRY 4
THE MISSING FLOPPIES 1989-91

Stymied by his prowess at ending a story without leaving any loopholes, Al couldn't find the key and unlock the door to Larry's future.

As luck would have it, an uncontrolled bout of sarcasm gave him the notion of skipping episode four and moving straight on to episode five, completely ignoring the stumbling block of how to continue the story with any synchronicity.

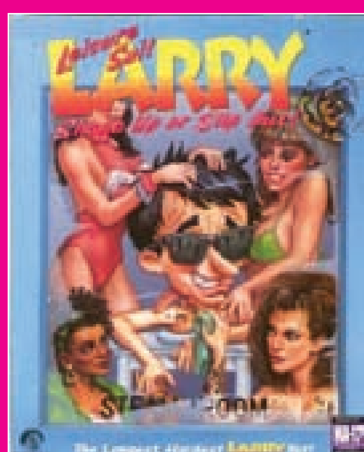
It also granted him the opportunity to mess with his fan's heads by letting them think they'd missed out on the game they'd been twitchingly waiting for, and judging by some of the talk from the adventure games internet community, Al's renumbering wheeze is still in full effect. He must be so proud!



LEISURE SUIT LARRY 5
PASSIONATE PATTI DOES SOME UNDERCOVER WORK 1991

Mobsters, proud of their thriving drugs trade, are disappointed by the drop in pornography sales. Deciding this is due to cable TV companies handing out smut on their networks, they apply funding to the Conservatives Against Nearly Everything (based on an actual Californian concern which was outraged by Larry's first game) who could make legislation to regulate television. Guess who now labours at just such a cable company?

Working as a tape rewinder at PornProdCorp, Larry must find a hostess for the company's new show, America's Sexiest Home Videos. Armed with a hidden camera and oozing charm, he must obtain footage of three sexy ladies without them knowing. This leads Larry on a salacious adventure of public nudity, mud wrestling, dental hygiene and more public nudity. This is a terrific satire of the entertainment industry and was just the ticket for getting Larry back out there doing his embarrassing thing.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY 6
SHAPE UP OR SLIP OUT 1994

The next instalment of Al's alter ego triumphantly returns to Larry's original goal of sexual conquest. No more desperately seeking a soul mate, just an embarrassing string of failed pick-ups and humiliating lap-dog errands in an attempt to get into a girl's unmentionables.

While checking out the talent at a beach, Larry is picked as a last minute replacement for the TV game show 'Stallions'. He then wins two weeks at the Costa Lotta health spa, but has no intentions of getting fit by normal methods.

This game was released in two versions. One on floppy disk that handled speech using text and bubbles, and the second on CD, offering a higher screen resolution and professionally recorded speech. Sierra and Al had spent a great deal of time and effort recruiting voice actors for Larry 6, and their labour is more than apparent in the finished product.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY 7
LOVE FOR SAIL 1996

Al Lowe states this to be his personal favourite among the Larry games. After the traumas he suffered at the end of LSL6, Larry decides to go on a cruise onboard the PMS Bouncy and meets the voluptuous Captain Thygh, who holds a weekly competition called the Thygh's Man Trophy Contest, in which 'she' is the first prize. Desperate to become just such a trophy, Larry sets about cheating at all the weird and wonderful contests the delectable captain has in store.

Also on board are a bevy of beauteous babes that Larry has a passing go at on his journey to becoming the captain's log, going by the almost familiar names of Drew Baringmore, Dewmi Moore, Victorian Principles, Jamie Lee Coitus and Annette Boning.

A fitting farewell to the Polyester Prince.

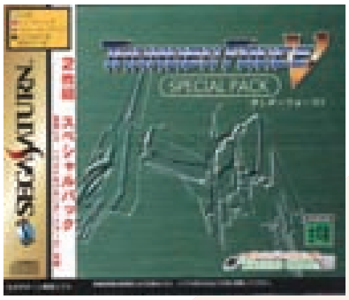
遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT TECHNO SOFT'S SUPERB 32-BIT SHOOTER

THUNDER FORCE V

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** TECHNOSOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SATURN
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** PLAYSTATION
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25 +
- » **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** R-TYPE DELTA

If you're desperate to enjoy the experience that is *Thunder Force V*, but are unable to import, then allow us to suggest Irem's wonderful *R-Type Delta*. Like *Thunder Force V*, it features an interesting mix of sprites and polygons (which have actually aged considerably better than those of the Techno Soft counterpart) a selection of tough bosses, and a choice of different spacecraft. It's also fairly easy to source and can normally be picked up for less than a tenner.



Interesting fact
Two versions of *Thunder Force V* were released for the Saturn. Collectors may want to opt for the 'Special Pack' that contains a bonus CD featuring re-mixed tunes from the first four games.

While it was possible to buy 8-bit consoles such as the PC Engine and Famicom (providing you knew where to look) it wasn't until the introduction of the 16-bit machines that import gaming truly took off in the UK. Each month, *Retro Gamer* will take a look at classic Japanese games that criminally never made it to UK shores. This month it's the turn of Technosoft's frantic shoot-'em-up, *Thunder Force V*.

雷力 **There can't be many shoot-'em-up fanatics that haven't savoured the delights of Techno Soft's superb *Thunder Force* series.** While the original *Thunder Force* was sadly confined to Japan, *Thunder Force II* and *IV* both appeared in the UK; with the latter in particular impressing Mega Drive owners, thanks to it's astounding aesthetics, stunningly designed levels and no-nonsense gameplay (although if we're brutally honest, we still prefer the sublime *Thunder Force III)*.

Although *Thunder Force V* appeared on both the Saturn and PlayStation, only the enhanced PlayStation version (which featured Free Play, Time Attack and a Master difficulty mode) was released outside of Japan, and even then it was confined to the United States. It's a real shame, as Techno Soft's first title is a wonderful continuation of the franchise and deserved to reach a much larger audience. Still, considering the UK's obsession with 3D fighters and driving titles at the time, and the general opinion of Sega's 32-bit machine, it's hardly surprising that neither of the excellent Saturn or PlayStation versions made it to the UK. Luckily, the Internet (and a reasonable amount of cash) now means that anyone with access to a chipped Saturn, PlayStation or PlayStation2 can fully enjoy it.

Play *Thunder Force III* or *IV* and the first thing you'll notice is just how great the sprite design still is. The Mega Drive games still look fantastic. Few gamers will forget the first time they fought their way across the volcanic terrain of *Gorgon* in *Thunder Force* III, or the harsh arid landscape of Daser in *Thunder Force IV*, and even less will forget the impressive bosses that populated all four games. Fire-breathing gorgons, giant mechanical fish and huge seemingly never-ending mother ships were just a few of the many colossi that you encountered. Fortunately, Techno Soft paid just as much



» You meet this mechanical monstrosity towards the beginning of level one. Sadly he's joined by some annoying slow down…

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

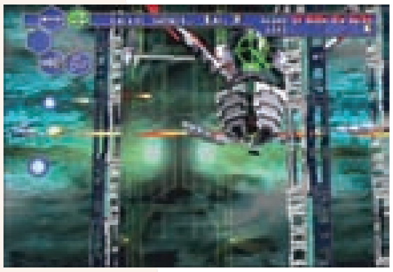
N PROMISE



» If you've ever played *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, this boss will be instantly recognisable. Well it would be if we hadn't just blown it to hell

care and attention to *Thunder Force V*, and while a few of the enemies on offer looked a little rougher around the edges, the majority were a joy to behold. Like the aforementioned *R-Type Delta, Thunder Force* used a mixture of polygons and sprites to create a level of depth that was unheard of on the earlier 8 and 16-bit games, and it's put to particularly good use when you face-off against the game's bosses.

While the first three stages could be selected in any order, it was best to tackle them systematically, because each end of stage behemoth was a real bitch to defeat. While level one's Deep Purple could be dispatched with just a few well-placed shots, players soon found that the remaining bosses took a ridiculous amount of firepower before they finally bit the dust. It was worth it though, if only to watch them explode into some of the most gorgeously bitmapped explosions we've ever witnessed. The many large foes weren't just confined to the end of each stage either, as Techno Soft had provided plenty of mid-level monstrosities (some of which seemed tougher than their end of stage peers) to keep you busy as you fought your way across the bleak landscapes. Fortunately, your Thunder Force craft was more than capable of dealing with whatever got thrown at you. Like the previous instalments, your craft came fitted with a standard set of weapons that could be easily cycled through at the press of a button. If you wanted to make things a little more interesting, it was also possible to individually map them to a specific button (just like in Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun*). While the new button configuration took a while to get used to, it soon proved extremely effective and became a cinch to use against some of the later bosses. Another nifty addition to your ship was that each weapon had a stronger, alternative method of fire that often gave you a huge advantage when you unleashed it upon your unsuspecting enemies. All this extra firepower may have sounded impressive, but it was needed. The *Thunder Force* series has never been a slouch when it comes to filling the screen with hordes of vicious enemies, but part V took the franchise into a whole new world of pain,



» Press the L button to hide that nasty H.U.D. Very handy…



» It looks impressive, but this oversized cycle is very easy to beat



» This spider boss appears halfway through level four and takes a huge amount of punishment before it eventually dies.

one that would initially have you screaming with frustration and inventing all sorts of new swear words as you struggled to come to terms with the sheer ferociousness of the many enemies.

Sadly, while *Thunder Force V's* finely tuned gameplay is still as strong as ever, it's now starting to show its age in the visuals department (not that it bothers us at all). The huge bosses still manage to impress (especially the huge spider on level 4) but some players may get annoyed by the irritating slowdown – particularly noticeable on the PlayStation version. Luckily, the music throughout is as glorious as ever, and features plenty of re-mixed tunes that will be instantly recognisable to anyone who has been lucky enough to play previous instalments.

It may well have seen better days, but *Thunder Force V* still retains all the qualitys of an essential shoot-'em-up. It's horribly addictive, features a staggering amount of inventive bosses and has a selection of banging tunes that will bore their way into your skull and refuse to leave. If only the proposed sixth game that was in development for the Dreamcast had actually seen the light of day…

» This mid-level boss from stage four puts up a fantastic fight and is an absolute bitch to put down. It's still our favourite boss though



私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

R-TYPE

OUR TYPE OF GAME



- **PUBLISHER** IREM
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £400+



HISTORY

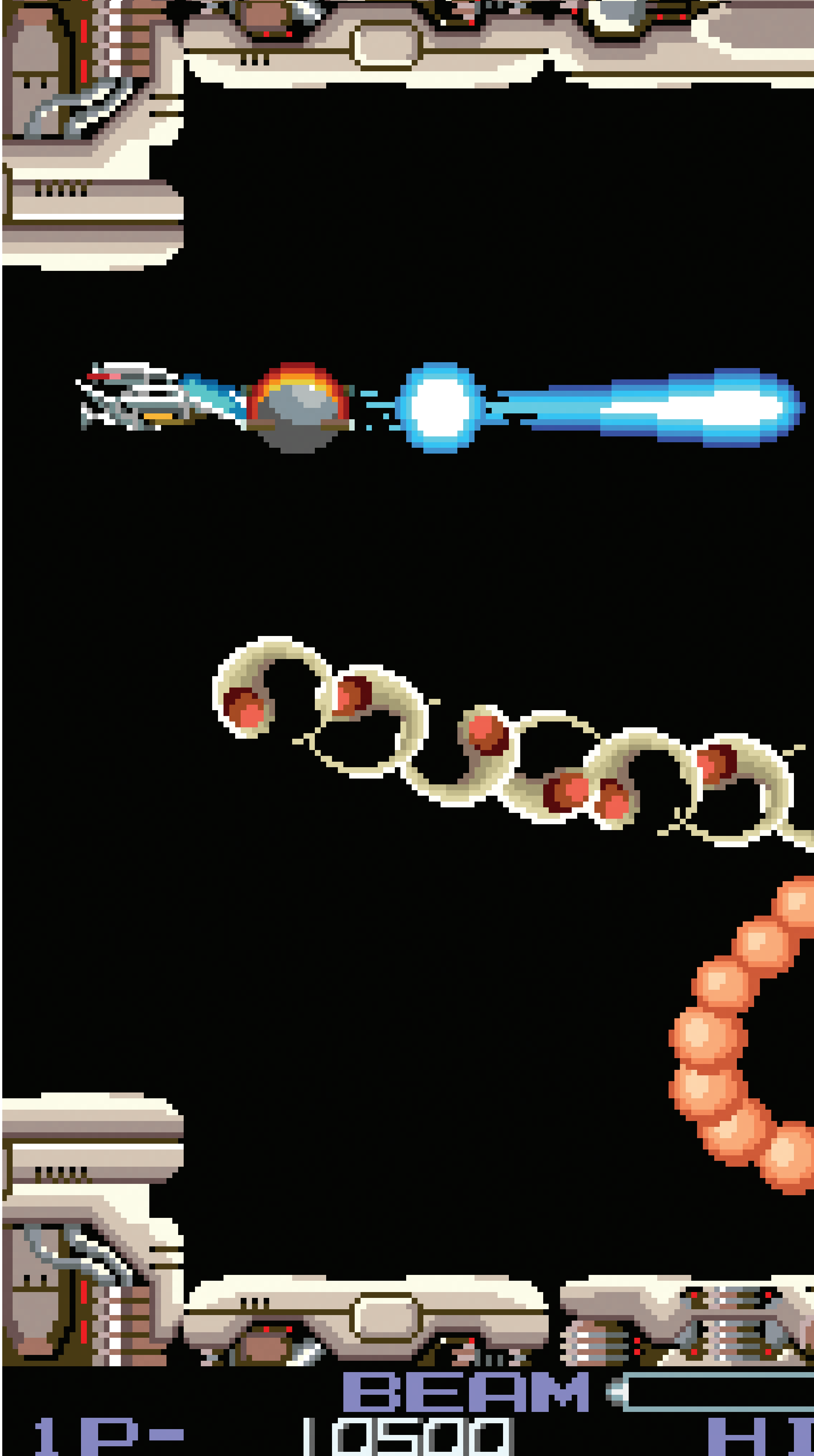
Some games are destined for greatness; others are mere flotsam that are doomed to float downstream into obscurity. *R-Type* is, despite all the odds, the former.

Back in 1987, Irem was barely even a speck of dust in the great pantheon of developers (even in terms of shooters, it wasn't a developer that would escape the lips of even the most ardent shoot-'em-up fan). No, in the golden age, gamers were still loyal to the twitchy controls and fast-paced action of the likes of *1942* or *Gradius*, and it seemed almost incomprehensible that any developer could shake Konami and Capcom's stranglehold on the shooting genre. This all changed when *R-Type* was unleashed onto an unsuspecting public.

Before *R-Type*, the idea was to destroy wave after wave of pixellated foe – here your goal was simple: survive. Though the levels were famously claustrophobic, you did at least have one vital companion: the Force Pod. This little critter could be positioned at the front of your craft, at the back of it, or it could remain detached (encircling you in the hope that it might offer some protection from the raging onslaught). It was especially useful when trying to attack hard to reach Bydo scum. In fact, getting through all of its eight levels was largely down to your ability to manage your Force Pod in the trickiest of situations.

Although it will be remembered for its innovative Force Pod, it was the amazing overall design that will linger longest in the memories of gamers. Not merely the level design itself (although it remains as potent to this day as it is challenging), but the marriage of the organic and the mechanical further added to an already atmospheric and generally oppressive gaming experience.

The truest measure of any game is how it stands up today, and, unlike so many other shooters (and perhaps even its four official sequels), *R-Type's* as playable now and as enjoyable as it ever was.




174500



THE CLASSIC GAME

SIMON THE SORCERER

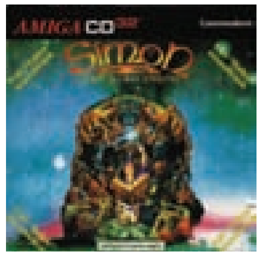
If you thought Lucasarts held a creative monopoly on the Amiga's adventure games then think again. In 1994, a tiny, family driven soft-co showed the American giants a thing or two with a new point 'n' click game that excelled in all areas. It had greater graphics, superior sound and funnier one-liners than *Monkey Island*? You better believe it. Ashley Day takes an extended look at the enchanting *Simon the Sorcerer*.

"FROM THE OPENING SCREEN SIMON THE SORCERER MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT YOU WERE ABOUT TO PLAY A LOVINGLY CRAFTED ADVENTURE WITH A WITTY SCRIPT AND SUPERB VOICE ACTING."

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ADVENTURE SOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **YEAR RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** POINT 'N' CLICK
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** UP TO £10



In the early Nineties you couldn't swing a joypad in a games shop without hitting a graphic adventure game. The likes of Lucasarts and Sierra churned them out almost quicker than gamers could complete them and there was little sign of the genre's eventual fall from grace. King of the adventure castle was, undoubtedly, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, a Lucasarts game that combined mind bending puzzles with a side-splitting script and a cheeky central character. Lucasarts made millions on the back of *Monkey Island's* success so it was no surprise when other adventure designers sought to mimic its unique style. Most imitators were unable to come close to replicating *Monkey Island's* appeal but one game was able to match the blockbuster and even surpass it in certain areas.

Simon the Sorcerer, one of only a handful of British adventure games that gave the big American titles a run for their money, was created and developed by Adventure Soft, a small family-based developer in the heart of Sutton Coldfield. Adventure Soft was born out of the ashes of Scott Adams' Adventure International company and at its core was the Woodroffe family, who handled almost every aspect the development process. Managing Director Mike Woodroffe led the programming team, his wife Tricia was Assistant Producer, son Simon wrote and designed the games, and little brother Jon play-tested them. Having cut their teeth on a number of 8-bit computer games and the Amiga's *Elvira*, series the Woodroffe's set out to make an adventure game that would compare favourably with the Lucasarts big hitters.

They achieved just that when, in 1993, *Simon the Sorcerer* hit the shelves to rapturous critical acclaim and fan adulation. Reviewers were enthralled by the remarkable background imagery, which was hand-drawn on paper then scanned and coloured using a computer, whilst players were enraptured by the Pratchett-esque humour and smart puzzles. *Simon the Sorcerer* was originally released on floppy disk for the Amiga and PC, but it is the Amiga CD version (released in 1994) that impresses the most thanks to its enhanced soundtrack and professional voice talent.

From the opening screen *Simon the Sorcerer* made it abundantly clear that you were about to play a lovingly crafted adventure with a witty script and superb voice acting. Upon popping the CD into the drive you were greeted with a quaint, ambling theme tune that drew you in and made you feel comfortable for the long hours of puzzle solving that lay ahead. Next came the introduction that set the scene and gave a first glimpse at the astounding visuals that would go on to define the title as a standout adventure game. Chris Barrie's voice work was immediately impressive and, although it was hard to believe he was a 12-year old boy, his cynical tones suited the script perfectly. As the intro was peppered with lines like "I can't believe you've watched this far" and "I would have skipped through it by now", Barrie's comedy background made him ideal for the part and reassured the player that this wasn't going to be a dull, po-faced point 'n' click.

» "That is one big pile of shit." Simon has a Jeff Goldblum moment.



THE CLASSIC GAME

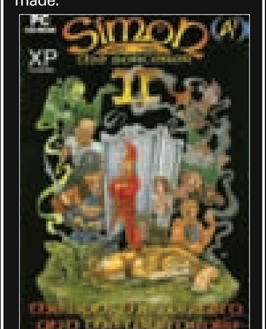
SIMON THE SORCERER

SIMON SAYS "MAKE A SEQUEL"

Simon the Sorcerer 2 made it's way onto the PC in 1995 with a belated Amiga version following in 2000. The most obvious change was the absence of Chris Barrie behind the microphone. Brian Bowles, who had contributed voice work to *Beneath a Steel Sky* the year before, took over and, although he was a more convincing 12 year old, his lines failed to deliver the sarcastic zest that Barrie had brought to the original. The quality of the script had also dropped a little; this version of Simon had traded in his wit and cynicism for simple nastiness and now only seemed capable of unsophisticated insults. Many original fans found this new Simon to be a thoroughly dislikable character and refused to take the sequel seriously.

There were other problems, like the map navigation system that removed any sense of exploration from the game, but *Simon 2* had its fair share of good points too. The excellent standard of graphics had been improved upon tenfold with many backgrounds (and foregrounds this time) looking absolutely stunning. The brilliant puzzles returned, as did some of the favourite characters like the Swampling who had started a chain of restaurants called Muc Swampy's.

Despite its shortcomings, *Simon the Sorcerer 2* was a brilliant game that lavished the player with hours of quality puzzling and hilarious misadventure. To overlook it would be to miss out on one of the best adventure sequels ever made.





» **He'd been in some tight spots before; but Simon** was in real hot water now…



The main body of the game built on the excellent introduction and kept the quality flowing. Every single screen was hand-drawn by Paul Drummond's small artistic department and really showed off what the Amiga was capable of when used properly. Whether Simon was strolling through the forest, exploring a Dwarven mine or ordering a Wet Wizard at the inn, the environment was painstakingly drawn with hundreds of colours and detailed textures. Incidental animations, like the cantering deer of the forest, or the ducks in the village pond, brought Simon's world to life, and the computer controlled characters, who chatted between themselves when left alone, ensured that the game remained involving even when you were pondering the latest problem.

The great thing about those solutions is that they were always logical. The Lucasarts games had encouraged players to combine seemingly incompatible items and use them in unthinkable places but every one of Simon's puzzles had a believable solution that made perfect sense. The only time the game presented an unfair challenge was when you couldn't find the right item. The number of on-screen colours pushed the hardware to its limits and occasionally made some items the same colour as the background. This meant that if you thought you were missing an item you had to scan the entire background with the mouse pointer to see if there was anything hiding there. Aside from the colour issue the puzzles were well thought out and, despite their logical solutions, were highly imaginative. Like the script, the puzzles weren't short of humour either. The Dwarf mine could only be entered if Simon cut off a Dwarf's beard and wore it himself, and the local wizards (masquerading as farmers) would only admit to their true identity when told that the mouse pointer revealed them to be wizards. An adventure game lives or dies on its puzzles and Adventure Soft had created a set of conundrums that were, for the most part, just challenging enough to be satisfying, and humorous enough to not cheese you off when things got tough; they got the formula just right.

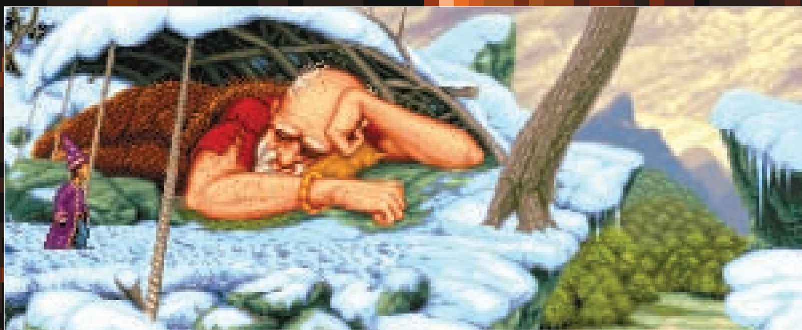
Forget the puzzles for a minute though. Forget the beautiful graphics and the music too. What really made *Simon the Sorcerer* special were the characters.



THEY SAID:

"IF YOU'D LIKE A FUN ADVENTURE, BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN SUCCESSFUL WITH THEM IN THE PAST, THIS IS THE ONE FOR YOU"

COMMODORE USER AMIGA



» If only there was someone who could push that tree over...

Simon's quest threw him headlong into the strangest situations and predicaments with the most unusual creatures, each of which was expertly scripted to squeeze out every last drop of humour that they had to offer. Years after the game's release, the parts that fans remember most fondly are the encounters with Simon Woodroffe's insane creations.

One of our particular favourites was the woodworm. Early in the adventure, Simon strolls past a tree stump in the forest only to hear a squeaky voice ask "Got a bit of wood on you mate?" Simon takes a look around, slightly perplexed by the disembodied voice then shrugs it off and continues on, but the voice addresses him again: "Just a bit of bolsa or plywood? We're not fussy." After realising that a family of woodworm and not the stump are talking to him, Simon finds himself drawn into a conversation on how humans are racist for not realising that woodworm can talk, and whether mahogany, beech or ebony is the tastiest wood.

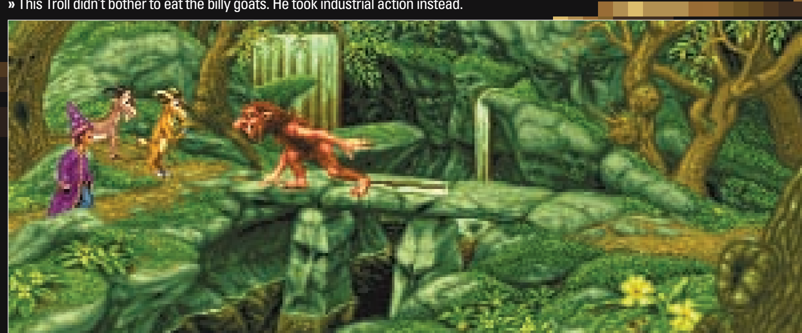
Another fond favourite is the lonely Swampling that Simon discovers sulking in his lakeside hut. The droopy-faced swamp creature is celebrating his birthday but nobody has bothered to turn up for the party. So as soon as Simon appears at the door he naturally takes the opportunity to play the good host and, after unfolding his sob story, sits our hero down and treats him to lovely bowl of swamp stew. At this point Simon can choose to eat the stew, which quickly leads to a very messy floor, or he can insult the swampling and leave. Insult the poor little creature, however, and the game will begin to break a few hearts. The Swampling breaks down, his nose running, and proclaims that nobody likes his stew and that he's having a terrible birthday. We defy any player not to feel incredibly guilty at this point and sit down for seconds.

Both of these memorable characters, as well as the plethora of fairy tale inspired folk that Simon meets along the way are effective because of the ground-breaking voice acting that Adventure Soft included on the CD. Chris Barrie is a great addition to the game and was rightfully hailed as such in 1994 but the supporting cast deserves just as much credit. Many of the voice actors put in multiple performances but there's no way to tell as each is completely individual and well suited to the style and animation of their own character. Most are amusing, if not hilarious, whilst others go the extra distance to actually tug at the heartstrings of the player. The Swampling sequence, for example, would not be half as traumatic to take part in were it not for the emotional depth that Jon Haines brought to the character with his sniffling, sorrowful tones.

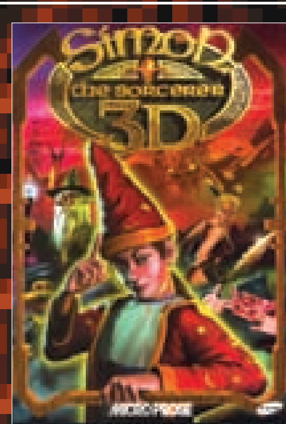
Even now *Simon the Sorcerer* is an outstanding game that sets a shining example to all other adventure games. Whilst many additions to the genre have impressive 3D graphics they cannot compete with the beauty of Simon's hand drawn 2D backgrounds. They don't have the range of colour, they don't have the extraordinary depth of field and they lack the detail. To make a 3D game that visually stood up to the standards of Simon's era would take a budget of several million pounds, which most publishers will not spare for a niche title. The puzzles stand out from modern efforts too, recent adventures have cut back on the number of item based puzzles, whilst some, like Fahrenheit, have done away with the inventory altogether. Simon's expansive inventory made it possible to tackle a number of puzzles in a non-linear order, a quality that is severely lacking today. The voice acting, which we've already championed at great length, is still worthy of note. You can still walk into your local video game shop and pick up a release with shoddy, clichéd voice acting but Adventure Soft got it right first time with great acting and an equally strong script.

Most of all though *Simon the Sorcerer* still feels fresh and entertaining today because it has soul. Adventure Soft's "Mom & Pop" work ethic ensured that the Woodroffe family poured their hearts into the game and it shows. Simon the Sorcerer is a true British gem that fully deserves to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Lucasarts classics and to reach a wider audience than its strong cult status has achieved.

» This Troll didn't bother to eat the billy goats. He took industrial action instead.



THIRD TIME UNLUCKY



Simon the Sorcerer 3D was originally completed in 2000 but evaded release for two years due to a lack of publisher interest, and its easy to see why. Even by the standards of five years ago the graphics were very blocky and compared with the high watermark set by the previous games they looked sloppy and unprofessional. Moreover, the poorly implemented 3D interface made control very unresponsive and resulted in Simon walking into walls far too many times for comfort.

There were some decent puzzles and a very funny story in *Simon 3D* but they were completely undermined by the shoddy graphics, clumsy controls and the return of Brian Bowles' offensive characterisation. This is made all the more disappointing by the fact that *Simon the Sorcerer 3* was originally a 2D game but was changed to 3D, part way through production, due to shifting market trends.

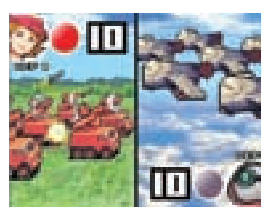


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

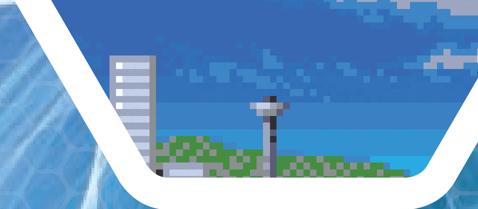
SIMON THE SORCERER
AMIGA/PC [1993]

SIMON THE SORCERER II
AMIGA/PC [1995]

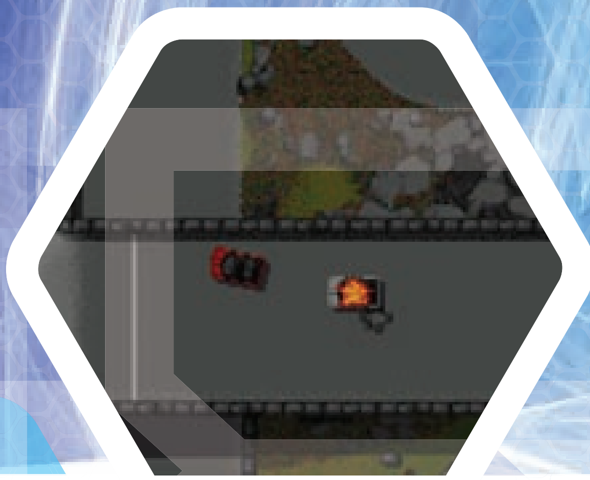
THE FEEBLE FILES
AMIGA/PC [1997]



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



Spanning over 20 years, from the VIC-20 to the modern multimedia in the UK games industry. Shaun started as a bedroom coder ideas. Along the way, he formed a successful partnership with – Magnetic Fields. Retro Gamer talked to Shaun and Andrew



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

MAGNETIC FIELDS

IN BRIEF

Shaun Southern has been creating computer games for over 20 years, and eventually teamed up with Andrew Morris to create Magnetic Fields. Over the years the duo have worked with the likes of Ocean, Gremlin and Mastertronic and have built up a deserved reputation for creating some of the best racing titles to ever grace the 8 and 16-bit computers.

Shaun Southern first came into contact with computers at school, dabbling in BASIC with a Commodore PET. A VIC-20 at home was the next step, progressing to machine code and squeezing games into the tiny memory. Those early games included *Ski Sunday* (known as *Olympic Skier* to avoid copyright problems). Crashing your skier into an obstacle brought forward sarcastic comments from the computer and a helicopter to fly your sprite to hospital. It also featured a version of "Pop Goes Bach", the theme tune to the BBC television series *Ski Sunday.*

Formula 1 Simulator was a cheap and cheerful budget game without a license. Commodore 64 fans remember it fondly for a great tune by Rob Hubbard. Very average graphics and frustrating gameplay could not hope to compete with more technical games like *Pitstop 2*, but across the different formats it became Mastertronic's number one seller of all time.

Coding back then was a lot harder without development systems and fancy languages. Code was typed in line by line, and faced the long wait for code to save/load from a tape.

"I'm glad it only had 3.5k of memory!" says Shaun. "In fact, there was a problem with the RAM on my first Vic-20, such that I could actually only use 2K. Good grief!"

Mr Chip Software was Shaun's publisher at the start of his career, but over the years he worked for several publishers and developers, as well as forming his own company. But what where they going to call it? Another employee came up with a name – Magnetic Fields.

"It was a programmer/producer we used to work with called Michelangelo Pignani. There's a name for you!" Andrew remembers. "He had a creative involvement with some of our early stuff, and designed some of his own games including *Xadium* (C16). I think it's true that the Jean-Michel Jarre album was where the idea came from but we were considering all sorts of electronic related names."

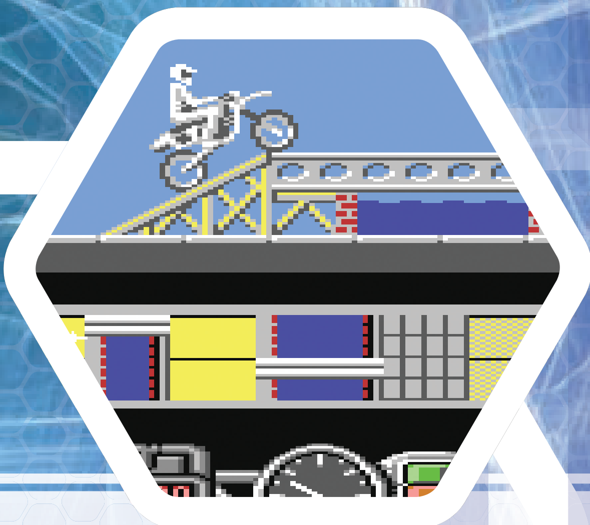
Southern moved onwards to other Commodore machines – starting with the Commodore 16 and Plus 4, the Commodore 64 and the Amiga. (The Plus 4 could play C16 games, but not the other way around. Both machines also lacked the hardware sprites that made the C64 a popular machine for programmers). Was sticking with Commodore's machines a deliberate choice from Shaun?

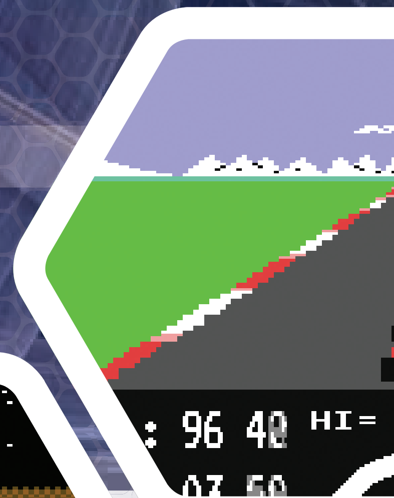
"I did stick with the Commodore machines, mainly because they were similar and you could use similar programming ideas, and of course the same machine code language." Shaun says. "The C-16 had lots of colours and the raster timer. The C-64 was better still and allowed everything to get bigger, graphics, levels, etc, and of course had the SID sound chip that produced some amazing results for FX and music! The C64 was very good at certain types of games, eg scrolling screens, and the hardware really influenced game design. You could do some really neat tricks, which was fun."

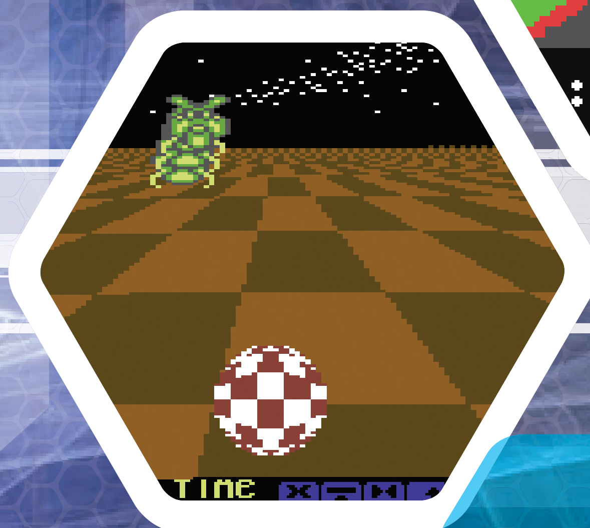
BLAZING A TRAIL

One of Shaun's most famous titles is *Trailblazer*, a curious combination of race and puzzle game published by Gremlin. Guiding your 'football'

PC, Shaun Southern has enjoyed a long and distinguished career and progressed from cloning arcade games to his own original graphic artist Andrew Morris and they formed their own company about polar bears, hidden games and fast cars…







along the interstellar highway, you have to avoid certain coloured tiles (black holes you can fall through, purple squares that stop you dead, and red tiles that slow you down). Other tiles do have their benefits; the white tile warps you along the level at high speed, with the player barely in control.

One thing that may surprise readers is which arcade game actually inspired *Trailblazer*. *Metro-Cross* had your character running along a horizontally scrolling landscape, jumping obstacles and hopping onto a skateboard to go faster. Shaun saw the chequered backgrounds, came up with the clever 3D effect and even wrote the music. How did he manage the fast 3D on an 8-bit machine?

"It was made possible by the raster timer which the C16 and C64 had, there were only two colours on the track which were set up based on a 3D table. Then it used sprites/characters for the ball, etc. Simple really. Other people did conversions of it on 'lesser' machines though, and I've no idea how some of those worked!"

Add in a split-screen two player mode where you can bounce the opponent off the level, a neat bonus section where you have to copy the computer's movements (a bit like the classic electronic game *Simon*) and you have a real hit. A year later, in 1987, the sequel *Cosmic Causeway* appeared with a full-screen 3D effect, enemies to shoot and massive dragons to kill (which were inspired by the Sega game *Space Harrier*). Moving walls were an added hazard, but you could pick up glowing tokens to purchase extra abilities. The most useful one allowed you to roll along the roof of enclosed sections. The fast 3D was impressive on the Amiga and ST, but even more so on the 8-bit C64.

SHOOT

Duckshoot (aka *Kwwazy Kwaks*) is a perfect copy of the arcade game *Carnival*. It's based on a shooting gallery, with pesky ducks flying down to eat your bullets. Between rounds an animal (for example, a polar bear) appears on a track. Shoot it and it runs the other way, gradually getting faster and faster until it can escape. It turned up years later as a hidden game on the Amiga. Shaun describes how he did the original conversion.

"I remember standing by the arcade machine waiting for it to pause so I could get the images exactly right. It was a fun and frantic little game. We always tried to put hidden games in the Amiga stuff. There was also 'ROX' on Lotus, a simple dodge-the-asteroids speed-'em-up survive-as-long-as-you-can sort of game. I spent many hours playing that, volume on full in a dark room, drinking loads of coffee…"

ON YER BIKE

"I used to watch the BBC programme *Kick Start* (not *Kik Start* – important, that bit!) and it just came from there." Shaun admits. For those who have never seen it, *Kick Start* was all about riding a motorbike over ridiculous obstacles: double-decker buses, giant rocks and piles of wooden pallets. It's probably most famous for the clip of two St John's Ambulance volunteers falling over as they rush to help a boy with his fallen bike…



» Kik Start II had improved graphics and the speedometer to help you (C64)



» Lotus 3 gave you both looped tracks and point-to-point racing (Amiga)

» P.O.D.'s garish backgrounds made dodging bullets a nightmare (C64)



The Commodore 64 version was first, and featured a horizontally scrolling display split into two halves; allowing two players simultaneously – or one player against the computer.

"It came from the fact that the C64 was very good at scrolling, and with that [side-on] view there was room for two players on the screen. The two player competitive element seemed to be a theme in our games, and made them all more fun." *Kik Start* went on to be one of Mastertronic's best-selling titles of all time. Shaun provided a simple rendition of the TV theme tune (Be My Boogie Woogie Baby, trivia fans!). Fortunately you could turn it off before it drove you mad.

The Commodore 16 version of *Kik Start* was single-player only, inspired by the arcade game *Superbike*. (This was actually a conversion kit for a *Donkey Kong* machine, and so quite rare). Your motorbike had to jump over obstacles and catch the balloons for extra points. Later levels had a stormy sky that threw down thunderbolts.

Soon afterwards Mastertronic released the enhanced Commodore 128 version on disk, with extra courses and obstacles. The 'proper' C64 sequel, *Kik Start 2*, came with a level designer and people took great delight in designing courses that were nearly impossible to complete without falling off. One major change was the addition of a speedometer, making it easier to judge the speed necessary to get over obstacles. It also marked an important point in Shaun's games.

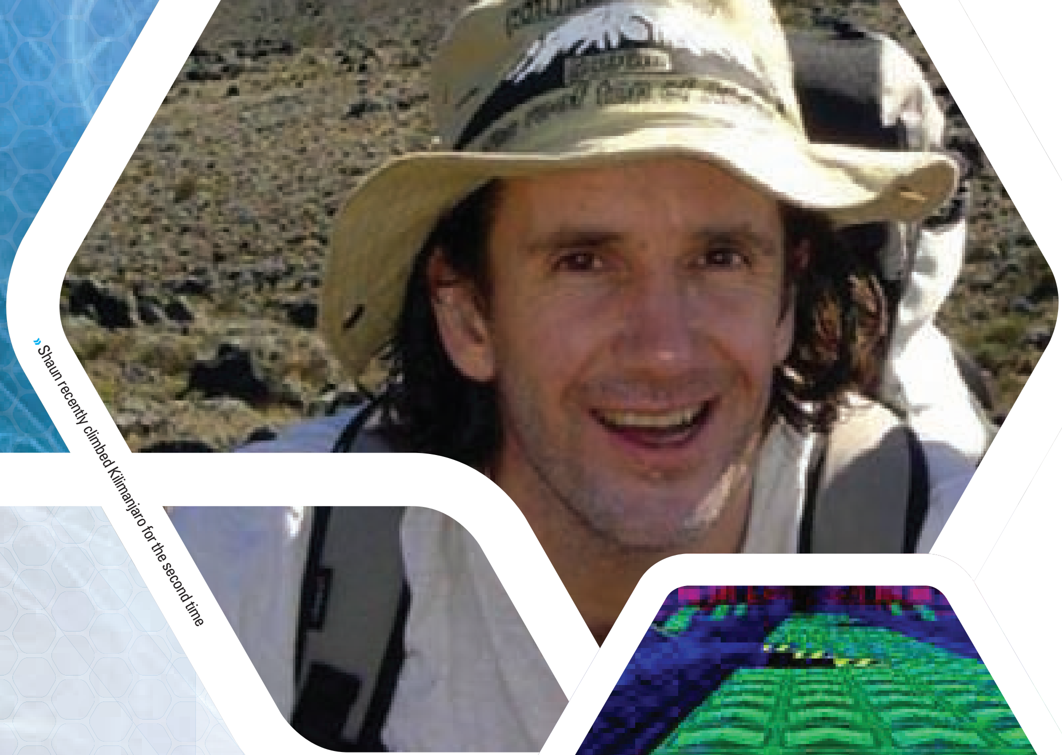
"Andrew Morris did the graphics on the second version. I think you can notice the difference. The designer made it so easy just to knock things together, but I'm not sure I ever saw anyone else's tracks. I tended to end up writing my own utilities a lot (crunchers, disk routines, etc) so almost every game had its own track editor of some sort, whether it was released or not…"

Shaun and Andrew went on to develop *Super Scramble Simulator* on both 8 and 16-bit machines. Out went the two-player mode and in came much larger graphics. The lower half of the screen became a top-down view of the course, helping you line up with an obstacle. While the game looked more polished, the gear system and crowded courses made it much harder to play, and it gained much lower marks than the *Kik Start* games…

MORE BITS

The 16-bit machines started to dominate the market, and Shaun followed many other developers and coders on the upgrade path. "The Amiga was a world apart. I got my first one in 1987 but didn't use it for a year! It still lent itself to certain types of games, but that is when the graphics came into their own. The 'copperlist' and 'blitter' chips could do some really great stuff. On all of them it was fun trying to get the most out of the machines. Oh yes, and it had a (floppy) disk drive, which helped speed up development – a bit – I still had to swap disks about three times before I ran the code!" With that power, Shaun and Andrew developed a series of racing games based on the famous Lotus cars (see Hot Rod).

A different sort of race was the focus of *Super Cars* and its sequel – one with lots of violence. Taking the top-down view of the classic



» Shaun recently climbed Kilimanjaro for the second time



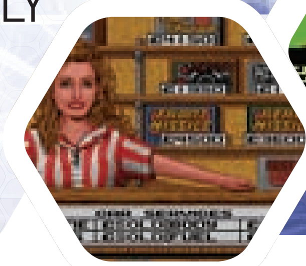
RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

Bringing the story right up-to-date, Shaun has returned to his old games for a new format.

"I now work for Gizmondo Games, who have brought out a new hand-held console that is almost as powerful as a PS2. It has Windows CE, fast 3D-graphics, stereo sound and a fast RISC processor, and that's only the start…. It's also a camera, an MP3 player, has GPS, plays movies, send texts and emails and much, much more… Anyway, although the idea and gameplay are the same, *Trailblazer* looks and sounds so much better. The track now goes up and down and can be much wider; in fact you can have more than one track in places! It's still down to beating your best times and surviving in Arcade mode, but the visuals and sounds are just amazing, and of course, it's running at 50fps… I am really excited about developing for this handheld – it suits the sort of games I like playing so well and is a perfect platform for new versions of retro games."

Trailblazer was one of the titles available at the launch of the machine, and you can find more details at www.gizmondo.com

"IN THE SHOP IN SUPER CARS WAS A GIRL, AND IF YOU ENTERED A CERTAIN CODE INSTEAD OF YOUR NAME, YOU COULD 'FONDLE' HER WITH THE POINTER – BUT IT COST YOU MONEY! "THE GIRL WAS APPARENTLY ONE OF OUR ARTISTS' SISTERS, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NEVER MET HER, LET ALONE, ER, BOUGHT MISSILES OFF HER…"





Super Sprint, you raced around a series of tight and twisty tracks fighting off computer-controlled cars. Earning money for finishing at the front, you could then spend it on faster cars, better armour, oil slicks and missiles…

In the shop was a girl, and if you entered a certain code instead of your name, you could 'fondle' her with the pointer – but it cost you money! Shaun was quick to point out, "the girl was apparently one of our artists' sisters, although I have never met her, let alone, er, bought missiles off her…"

Andrew didn't recall it happening either. "I don't remember that, perhaps an urban myth? The pointer was a hand though so maybe that's how it looked. You could click on the sky and it would tell you about the greenhouse effect (yes, really)."

The sequel came out less than a year after the original, with some very funny interlude screens where you had to take a Highway Code test by identifying signs. There were more weapons (rear and forward missiles) and even more opponents to race.

Cars also helped Magnetic Fields move onto the PC and become a bigger company. *Super Cars International* added features to the Amiga version of *Super Cars 2*, and *Network Q Rally Championship* gained good reviews despite competition in the form of *Sega Rally*. More rally games followed; in 1997 there was Rally Championship, and in 1999 *International Rally Championship*, which once again received high review scores.

THE ANDREW MORRIS STORY

Andrew Morris played *Space Invaders* in the arcades, and bought his first computer – a ZX81 – in 1981, when he was 12. He started typing in BASIC programs for games, but without a working tape recorder he had to do this every time he wanted to play a game. Having started designing games and graphics on the ZX81, he continued as he upgraded to more machines – a ZX Spectrum, Texas TI99/4A, the Commodore 64 and so on.

Andrew joined Mr Chip Software as a programmer after leaving school. Most people were programmers back then, as other roles had yet to emerge. Shaun was already working there, and because Andrew enjoyed the creative aspect of games more than the technical side, he found himself working with programmers on game design and graphics. Andrew is very candid and says: "Shaun was the best programmer there and the most prolific but not a great artist (sorry Shaun). We found we worked well together and made a good team."

As for who influenced Andrew's graphics, there's one answer: "The only computer artist who comes to mind is Dan Malone. He designed the graphics on one of my all-time favourite games: *The Chaos Engine*. In 'real-life' I'm very much drawn to architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright is someone I admire. I have always liked Art Deco and tried to incorporate elements into some of the graphics I did."

To relax, Shaun and Andrew like very different games. Shaun says, "Even now, I prefer to play fast and simple games – like *Asteroids*. As someone in our office called them, 'twitchers'. The controls must be



"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PLEASED TO GIVE MY PERMISSION FOR ANY OLD GAME I'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN TO BE MADE AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET ON A NON-PROFIT BASIS. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING SOME OF THE OLD GAMES AGAIN."





SHAUN SOUTHERN SOFTOGRAPHY

Over the years Shaun (on his own and as part of Magnetic Fields) has worked on a huge amount of titles, picking up high scores and many awards (like a ZZAP! Sizzler, or Budget Game of the Year). Here's a complete run-down with the format and year of release. (With multi-format games there may be more than one year mentioned).

Three great games of chance
VIC20, 1984
Ski Sunday/Olympic Skier
VIC20/C16/C64, 1983-1986 (different versions)
Polaris
VIC20, 1984
Jackpot/Vegas Jackpot
VIC20/C64/C16, 1983-1984
Kwazy Kwaks / Duckshoot
VIC20/C64/C16, 1983-1984
Pacmania
C64/C16, 1985-1986
Operation Fireball
C64, written 1985 and released in 1987
Laserwheel
C16/C64, 1985-1986
Ad Infinitum/Disaster Blaster
C16/C64, 1985
F1 Simulator
C16/C64, 1985
Speed King
C16, 1985
Hero of the Golden Talisman
C64, 1985
Kik Start
C64/C16, 1985-1986
Kik Start II
C64/C128, 1985-1986
Trailblazer
C16/C64, 1985-1986
Bandits at Zero
C16, 1986
Tutti Frutti
C16, 1986
Super Snake Simulator
C16/C64, 1986
Jetbrix
C16, 1986
Cosmic Causeway
C64, 1986
POD (Proof Of Destruction)
C16/C64, 1986-1987
Arthur Noid
C16, 1988
Hummdinger
C16/C64, 1988
Super Scramble Simulator
C64/Amiga, 1988
Supercars
Amiga (converted to C64 and ST), 1990
Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge
Amiga/ST, 1990
Supercars II
Amiga/ST, 1990
Lotus II
Amiga/ST, 1991
Lotus III
Amiga/ST, 1992
Kid Chaos
Amiga/CD32, 1994
Supercars International
PC, 1996
Network Q Rally Championship
PC, 1996
Rally Championship
PC, 1997
International Rally Championship
PC, 1999

ANDREW MORRIS SOFTOGRAPHY

In the early years, Andrew contributed to many games at Mr Chip Software and worked on some that were never published. The following softography only includes those titles he co-authored, most with Shaun.

1985 – 1989

Mr Chip Software
Kik Start 2
C64
Xadium
C16
Lazerwheel
Spectrum
Cosmic Causeway
C64
Rollaround
C64, Amstrad, Spectrum
Hummdinger
C64
Super Snake Simulator
C64
Wrangler
Amiga, Atari ST

1989 – 2000

Magnetic Fields (Software Design) Ltd
Super Scramble Simulator
Amiga, Atari ST, C64
Super Cars
Amiga, Atari ST
Super Cars 2
Amiga, Atari ST
Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge
Amiga, Atari ST
Lotus Turbo Challenge 2
Amiga, Atari ST
Lotus 3: The Ultimate Challenge
Amiga, Atari ST
Kid Chaos
Amiga / CD32
Super Cars International
PC
Network Q RAC Rally Championship
PC
Rally Championship: The X Miles
PC
Mobil 1 Rally Championship
PC, Arcade
International Rally Championship
PC



HOT ROD

The Lotus series of games on the Amiga proved very popular, a 3D racing game viewed from behind the car. It was officially licensed with graphics based on real cars. How did it happen?



ANDREW: After *Super Cars*, Shaun and I worked on a shoot-'em-up, which wasn't going that well. As a car-obsessive, I wanted to do another car game and had always been impressed by *Pit Stop 2*, an early Commodore 64 game that used a two-player split screen. Shaun came up with a really fast 'road routine' that would form the basis of the game. We developed it to a fairly advanced stage (with a Porsche) when we contacted Gremlin, who had just done a deal with Lotus. It all clicked into place and a legend was born…

SHAUN: We wanted to do a fast and smooth game on the Amiga, and in one-player mode *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* worked on one frame (ie 50fps), whereas most other games on the Amiga were too jerky. Again, it was down to a neat 'sort-of' 3D routine and using the Amiga's copperlist and blitter chips to do what they were good at; instead of trying to design a game, then wonder how to do it quickly enough.

simple and responsive, that way you know that you are in control, and if you die, it's your fault, so you are keen to play it straight away again and put it right, hence addictive. I don't play too many games in my spare time, as I don't have that much." Andrew prefers "Something with cars in it. I'm currently playing *Gran Turismo 4*, and *Metal Gear Solid 3*. I'm also a *Resident Evil Fan*."

And what's their opinion on emulators and retro gaming? "It's wonderful," Shaun says. "I haven't got any of the old machines, or even copies of my games, but I can play them all on my PC now! The only thing is, they may play well, but they tend to look and sound a bit, er, dated? Okay, crap!" Andrew thinks emulators are an absolutely fantastic idea.

"I'm really pleased that people are still interested in the old games and that they don't simply disappear. In the past, I've always been pleased to give my permission for any old game I've been involved in to be made available on the Internet on a non-profit basis. I'm looking forward to seeing some of the old games again, many of which I haven't seen since they were released."

BAD BEHAVIOUR

Working with each other for over 15 years must mean there are some funny stories to tell. Any late night coding sessions, strange behaviour, that sort of thing?

Shaun confesses, "Lots of late night coding sessions. The strange behaviour would probably have come from me, as Andrew doesn't drink, and I tended to think it was my duty to drink twice as much to make up for it. I remember at a Gremlin launch for either one of the *Lotus* or *Super Cars*, I attempted to do a drunken forward roll through a set of swing doors and collided with a waiter carrying a tray full of drinks. He didn't drop any at all!"

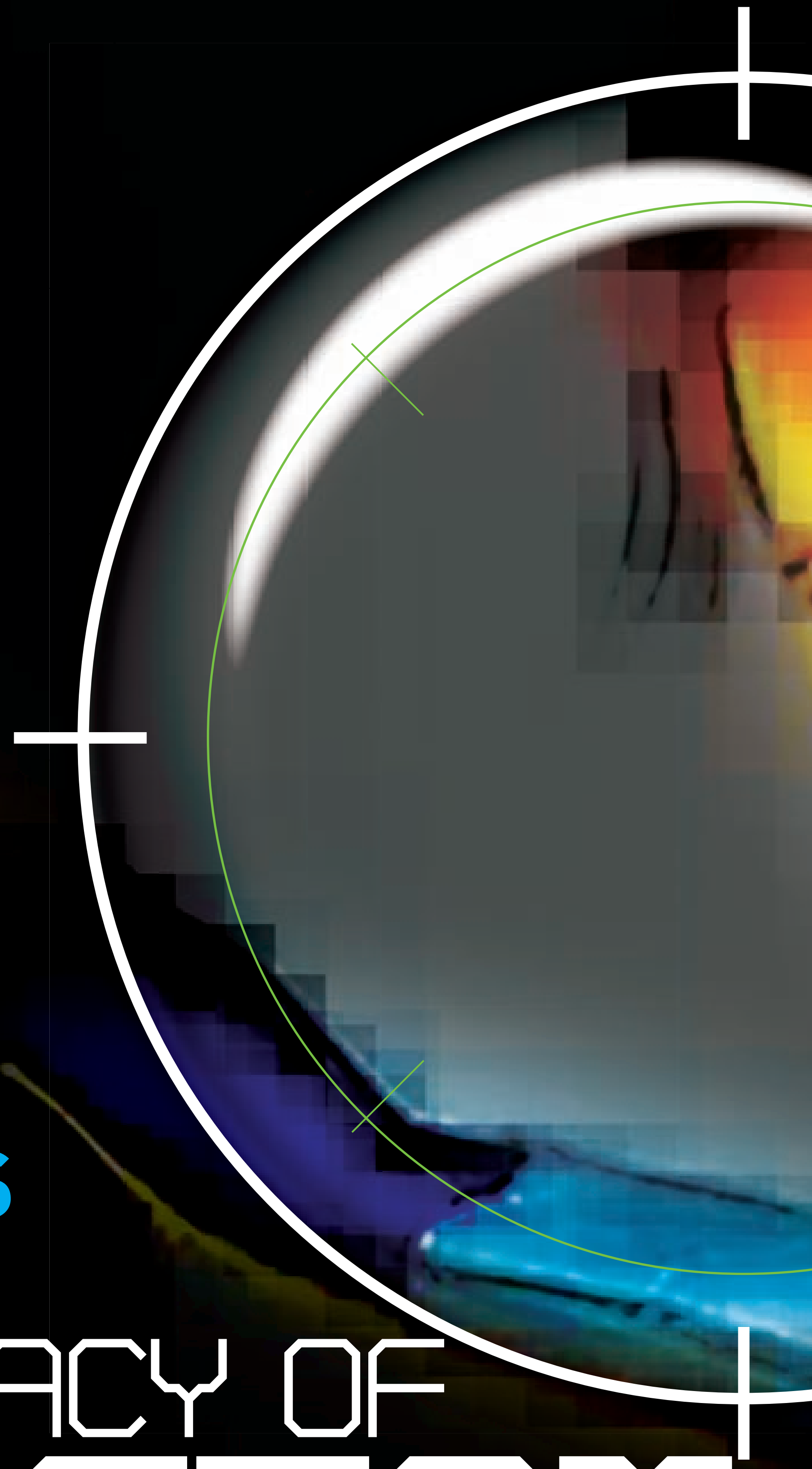
Andrew spills the beans as well. "Shaun likes a drink and I remember him drinking a little too much on occasion(s). The launch dinner for *Super Cars* at Brands Hatch comes to mind and I'm sure he was still drunk when he took the single-seat Formula Ford around the circuit the next day. I also remember doing 'research' with him for a driving game in his pick-up truck. It involved driving through the woods down a rough gravel track at 100mph and he hadn't even been drinking this time. It wasn't actually that different when I got to do it years later with a real rally driver."

"We managed to confuse the DJ at a computer show launch for *Lotus* by getting a score in a competition that was so far ahead of what anyone else had managed that he was completely lost for words. We were ready to walk off with the prize (I think it was a car) until one of the staff told him who we were. Unfortunately, he really didn't see the funny side."

"Shaun also likes his chilli and usually carries a bottle around with him, as one does. I remember him smearing it around the rim of people's drinks at another event only for us later to see red faces and tears. Not the best way to get good review scores..."

eMag

"PERFECT DARK TOOK ALL THE INGREDIENTS THAT MADE GOLDENEYE SUCH A CLASSIC AND DRAGGED THEM SCREAMING AND KICKING OUT OF BOND'S UNIVERSE"



THE LEGACY OF PERFECT

CLOSE YOUR EYES AS WE JOURNEY INTO



DARK

THE HEART OF DARK...

PETER MOORE RECENTLY SAID, "PERFECT DARK ZERO IS GOING TO BE TO XBOX 360 WHAT HALO 2 WAS TO XBOX"

THAT'S A BOLD CLAIM AND AT FIRST WE thought he must have said it during a session on the space-pipes, but then we thought about *Perfect Dark* on the N64 and realised his claim may not have been as ridiculous as first thought. Rare's first-person-shooter, released half a decade ago, racked up review scores very much like *Halo*'s. GamesMaster gave it gave it 94 per cent, just 1 per cent less than they gave the Master Chief, and it continued to rack up so many 99 per cents on websites that if you stuck them all side-by-side there'd have been enough 9s to call the police out to a million crimes.

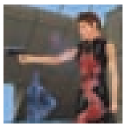
Although *Perfect Dark* isn't as famous as its father figure *GoldenEye* (entirely down to the fact that *GE* came first), the masses all agreed it was a better game. Not only did it have one of the best single-player stories to wrap itself around, it also had three astonishingly different difficulty settings. Where most games just throw a few more baddies into the fracas or deprive you of the odd health pack, *Perfect Dark*'s increase in challenge coughed up a whole new game. Missions that would have otherwise had three objectives in Agent would have five in Secret Agent or even seven in Perfect Agent. It was considered by most to be the most replayable game in history, which is high praise indeed for something that's completely scripted. It also had, for the time, the most comprehensive selection of multi-player games there had ever been (and would hold onto that until the dawn of Live). So where did this almost perfect game come from?

Back in '97, Britain's top development house Rare gave the N64 the truly ground-breaking *GoldenEye*, which many people today consider to be the finest N64 title of all time, jostling with *Mario* and *Zelda* for votes. In fact, there are still people that think *GoldenEye* is the best first-person-shooter to date, better even than modern giants like *Halo* and *Half-Life*. The reason it blasted all its competition out of the water was because of its sublime play-control, phenomenal character physics and unbelievably good level design. It was the first shooter where you actually controlled the hand. All shooting games prior to it (and most to date) might as well have been called *We Are The Daleks*. Play *Doom*, *Quake*, even *Halo* and your gun-holding hand is a motionless lump of frozen meat protruding from the front. You want to aim, you have to turn the whole body. It's like your arm's locked up like you've had it stuck out for 25 years to impress the boys at the Hindu Kumbh Mela bathing festival. Rare invented a system that gave the player control of the hand, thus making for the deepest, most complex and downright skill demanding control system to date. This alone wouldn't have meant a damn without the revolutionary character physics. Take an enemy in *Quake*. It makes no odds if you shoot in the foot or between the eyes; it's just hit or miss. *GoldenEye,* on the other hand, differentiated between different parts of the body, and the one-shot-one-kill headshot was born. Just letting rip in an enemy's direction just wasn't good enough. Controlling a sensitive cursor whilst trying to blast an enemy head that's dodging and weaving required a level of skill unheard of even on the PC. It might have taken an age to master, but once sussed it took the gameplay so deep that it would take ten times

THE PERFECT DARK POSSE

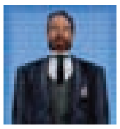
THE LADIES, GENTS AND LAPTOPS WHO MAKE UP THE CAST

JOANNA DARK
AGE: 23



That's you, that is. Donning a haircut that's less diva and more discreet (rather than the flaming lighthouse she has in *Zero*), new agent Jo scored the highest in every field of her training and can shoot the hat off a wasp a thousand miles away. She's been nicknamed 'Perfect Dark' due to her being perfect and having the surname 'Dark'. Makes sense. Little is known about her (or anyone's) background during *Perfect Dark*, which is probably why the prequel is here to flesh it out.

DANIEL CARRINGTON
AGE: 62



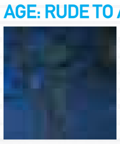
Founder and head of the Carrington Institute, when you first hear Carrington speak, you can't help but think of Dominic Diamond desperately needing to get to the bog. Always sounding like he's in a rush, his verbal spatterings shoot from his lips like bullets from an old AK47. He's a decent old bloke who loves his agents to bits and insists that you can only fire at people who are firing at you. Thank God most people are firing at you, then, or it'd have been rubbish.

DR CARROLL
AGE: GEE, DUNNO



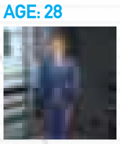
We certainly didn't see this one coming. When you first pile into PD to rescue this highly intelligent PHD holder you're expecting a bloke who looks like Graham Gardner to walk out, not this hovering laptop thing that's got eyes that look like they could swallow your soul. DataDyne keeps messing him up and you need to rescue him. Eventually he'll make the ultimate sacrifice and blow a huge alien spaceship up while he's in it. That will be his 'honour' hardware, then.

ELVIS
AGE: RUDE TO ASK



Not exactly the most original design for an alien, Elvis speaks English and is a Maian, an other-world race that came in peace and have picked up English because they've been watching us the longest. Clearly, Elvis was busy watching *Star Wars* and sounds like Yoda (think hi-pitched Yoda in *Empire*). First you have to save his arse from being dissected in Area 51, then later on he turns all commando and joins your side in firefights. What a brave little anorexic Michelin Man.

JONATHAN
AGE: 28



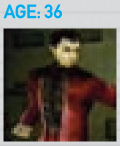
Look at the state of him. If you saw him being robbed down a back alley you might well pull your phone out, but it won't be to call the police but rather to take a picture of it to sell to Bizarre magazine. However, Jonathon does you proud in Area 51 by going undercover to help you rescue Elvis. You even get to fight side-by-side for some of it. He prattles on quite a lot, mind, so thankfully there's no romance even remotely suggested between Jo and Jon. Thank crikey for that.

MR BLOND
AGE: GOSH KNOWS



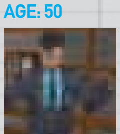
The only word that can best describe this man-shaped collection of evil atoms is 'devilsome'. The main bad guy and the head of dataDyne's muscle, Mr Blond (no relation to the psycho in *Res Dogs*) actually turns out to be a Skedar alien who's disguised with a hologram of a man. And he doesn't suffer fools, either, killing people who fail him with a quick slash of his claw. He's got a chest that would take any other man centuries to build up. Or rather, his hologram has.

TRENT EASTERN
AGE: 36



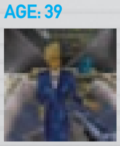
This foul swindler is the head of the Nation Security Agency (NSA) and should be doing good for mankind, not playing silly beggars with evil corporations who are dabbling in alien technology and conspiracies. He's constantly pestering the President for a boat; one that he suggests he needs for good use but in actual fact is for dataDyne-related evilry. Don't worry, like all snivelling shits he'll get his. Oh yeah.

THE PRESIDENT
AGE: 50



For the President of the United States this bloke's thicker than Lisa Riley's thighs. Oblivious to the fact that Trent is in cahoots with dataDyne and Mr Blond, it's his job to do, well, very little. He annoys Trent by saying he can't borrow the boat while on Air Force One, and he's kidnapped and cloned. He's a useless old duffer with nothing but dribble pouring from his pucker. He also looks like Morgan Freeman.

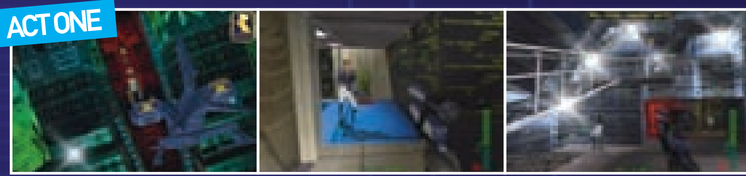
CASSANDRA DEVRIES
AGE: 39



The suggested but not really head of dataDyne, this utterly nasty gathering of unkind limbs that have been sown together is driven by her desire for power. She's also a right cow and you'd happily blow her head off (but she's never armed, gah!). She looks like a predatory Lesbian, the kind that suggests to female temps that a staff job might await but it needs talking about over a drink.

THE STORY SO FAR

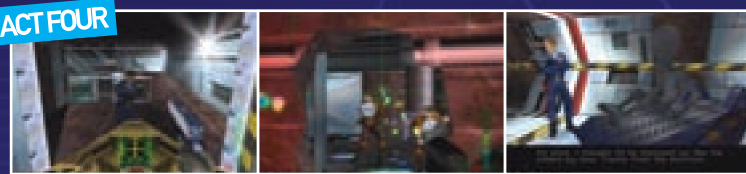
ACT ONE



DATADYNE HQ

It starts with Jo flying towards the top of dataDyne's HQ, the Lucern Tower, as Carrington is briefing her. Her mission is to rescue Dr Carroll, who's contacted the Carrington Institute saying he's being held against his will by dataDyne. You finally reach the Dr only to find out he's a flying laptop with big mad eyes. You escort him from the building and have a goose around. Loads of people try to pop a cap in your arse. You battle your way back to the rooftop and receive an earful from the monstrous Cassandra as you kill her bodyguard before being extracted by jump ship.

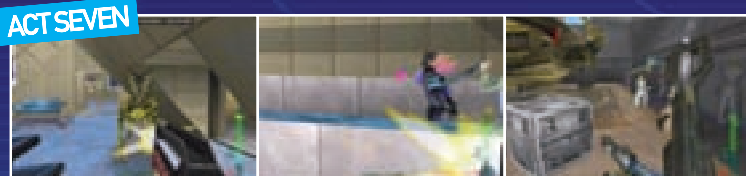
ACT FOUR



AREA 51

One of Carrington's friends who was meant to be backing you up in Chicago was shot down by dataDyne's missiles and taken to this infamous area of alien Hokey-Pokery. He turns out to be a little alien fella who's about to get sliced up on the surgery table. You break into the labs disguised as a technician and rescue him with the help of fellow spy Jonathon before getting him (and yourself) the hell out of dodge on his flying saucer. He tells you that he's called Elvis.

ACT SEVEN



CARRINGTON ATTACK

Back at the Carrington Institute, all seems well until a huge Skedar turns up and the shit hits the fan. Most of the staff have been taken hostage by dataDyne heavies and your job is to cap some hide and free the good folk, retrieve a special weapon that dataDyne must not get hold of, then deactivate a huge bomb the Skedar have brought to blow the institute up. After doing all these great things and getting everyone out, you're toppled by a Skedar and knocked out cold.

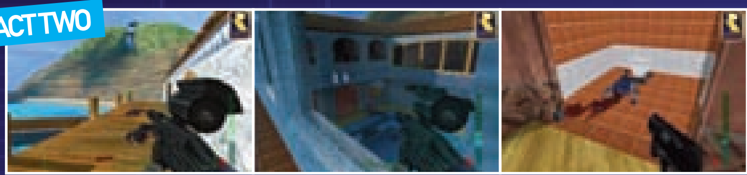
longer before you even began to tire of it. To cap it in a word – *GoldenEye* was all about precision.

Perfect Dark took all the ingredients that made *GoldenEye* such a classic and dragged them screaming and kicking out of Bond's universe. Rare was bored of watching *Bond* films year-in-year-out and wanted to make something original, something that didn't have to follow styles created by movie producers who could restrict what Rare could do. Shortly after *GoldenEye* was completed, Rare was asked to produce a sequel but turned it down flat. Martin Hollis and his team wanted to create a sci-fi world, something that felt futuristic and dark, moulded from a *Bladerunner* cast. They also liked the idea of a kick-ass female lead, something made popular in the nineties by films such as *Nikita* and *Fifth Element*. And having spent a good three years seeing the world through Bond's masculine eyes, it probably fancied getting as far away from the smooth-talking, gun-touting '00' agent as possible.

Set in 2023, *Perfect Dark* was perfect in every way possible. Graphically, it kicked everything on the N64 into a cock-shaped hat and for the first time *GoldenEye* maniacs (who were

PERFECT DARK ZERO IS SET BEFORE PERFECT DARK, SO IF YOU'VE NOT PLAYED THE N64 ORIGINAL IT SHOULDN'T MATTER A DAMN THAT YOU DON'T KNOW THE STORY. HOWEVER, HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ORIGINAL

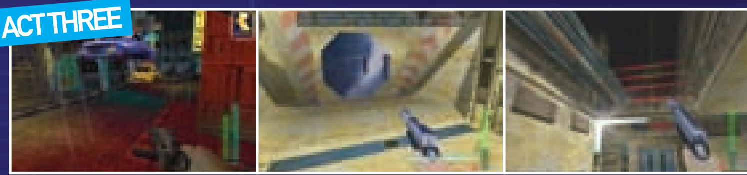
ACT TWO



CARRINGTON VILLA

In a complete pissy fit for your massacring of her posse and rescuing Dr Carroll, Cassandra decides to regroup and storms Carrington's fine holiday home, takes Carrington hostage, and begins torturing the whereabouts of Dr Carroll out of him. After saving the negotiator from certain death, you have to make your way through this ludicrously big house, pumping enemies full of death bullets and finally rescuing the slightly toasted Carrington. Unfortunately, he's told them where Dr Carroll was, the bloody wimp…

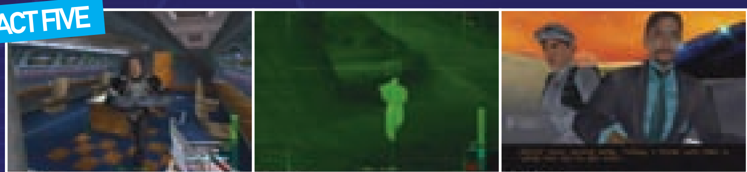
ACT THREE



CHICAGO

Carrington has heard word that Cassandra is planning on meeting some unsurely hombres at the G5 building in Chicago. After making your way into the building using stealth and reprogrammed taxis that helpfully float off and explode, you then blast your way through a car park rammed full of baddies that are using some weird cloaking device. You record a meeting between Cassandra, Mr Blond and Trent who are talking nothing but evil, then you steal a back-up of Dr Carroll's personality and blast your way out of the windy city.

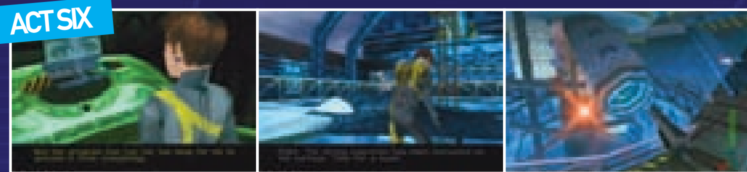
ACT FIVE



THE PRESIDENT

You start off trying to find the President in an Alaskan airbase before boarding Air Force One. Trent badgers the President to loan him the Pelagic II but is turned down which angers Trent plenty. An alien craft attaches itself to AF1 but Elvis turns up in his UFO and helps out. Explosions ensue and everyone hits the Alaskan snow. You find the president with Trent, you kill a clone of the president, then rescue the president with Elvis' UFO. Mr Blond reveals his true Skedar self when killing Trent for being useless.

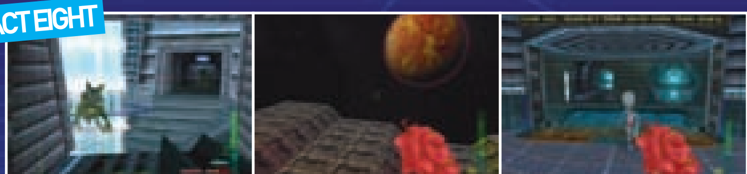
ACT SIX



PELAGIC II

This huge ship needs taking out. You and Elvis arrive but have to split up. After you've shut down its navigation and power systems, you and Elvis escape in a mini-sub and head down to a crashed alien ship on the ocean floor. A weapon of ludicrous power is within its walls, which is what dataDyne's been after. You encounter Skedar aliens for the first time and meet a badly beaten up Dr. Carroll who is going to blow the ship up while you escape. Run away!

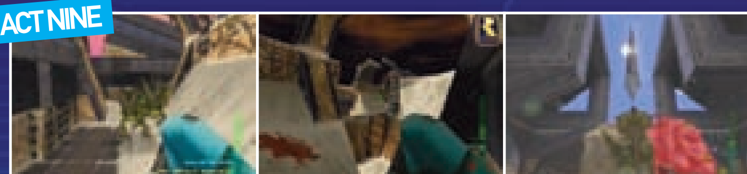
ACT EIGHT



SKEDAR ATTACK SHIP

You wake up in a cell with Cassandra DeVries who for some reason sacrifices herself so you can escape. Not really redemption, she had no choice. You fight some Skedar with just a knife then bring down the shields so Elvis and his mates can board the ship and help out. After accessing the navigation system and gaining control of the bridge, you finally take control of this huge Skedar floating space-boat. You've also got the whereabouts of the Skedar's most holy planet, which you're about to devastate.

ACT NINE

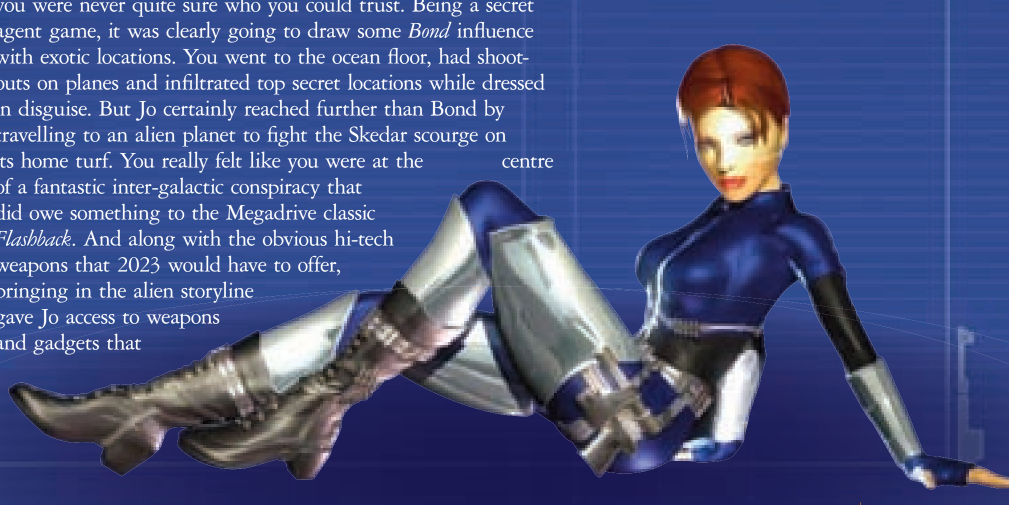


SKEDAR HOME PLANET

This is the holiest bit of the entire planet, and you're going to level it and put an end to the Skedar's evil ways. After targeting specific religious monuments, Elvis bombs them from space, then you battle across the planet until you meet the horrific Skedar King. He's a big fella and fires rockets at you – considering you're here to blow up his church he's got good reason to be annoyed. Once buried, the game ends. This is the last point in the *Perfect Dark* timeline. A bit like when Butch and Febienne drive off on Z's bike in *Pulp Fiction*.

still playing it religiously in 2000) put down their joypads and charged to the shops in droves to buy *Perfect Dark*. It worked on so many levels that the series would become synonymous with complete and utter perfection all the way from the N64 to the Xbox 360. The character, Joanna Dark, was perfectly designed. Rather than parking a couple of coconuts under her shirt, giving her a face you wouldn't mind licking and sticking her in shorts tight enough to cause a blood clot, Rare was less concerned with giving the player something to goggle at and went for something down-to-earth, the kind of girl who you could easily find working in a Waterstones book shop. Nice looking, but nothing you'd expect to see on the cover of FHM.

The storyline was a crafted work of genius, which branched out much further than they'd have been allowed to with a *Bond* game. Evil corporations like dataDyne are no new thing, neither are secret agent organizations like Jo's Carrington Institute, but because it was Rare's own world, it could do and introduce whatever it liked. Including aliens. Jo's world was a complex web of mystery and conspiracies that was clearly inspired by *The X-Files* while maintaining a sense of humour. Good Maian aliens took the shape of the classic image created by Spielberg's *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. Evil Skedar aliens look like lizards spliced with scowling cats who were bent on the destruction of Earth. Corrupt politicians were up to no good and you were never quite sure who you could trust. Being a secret agent game, it was clearly going to draw some *Bond* influence with exotic locations. You went to the ocean floor, had shoot-outs on planes and infiltrated top secret locations while dressed in disguise. But Jo certainly reached further than Bond by travelling to an alien planet to fight the Skedar scourge on its home turf. You really felt like you were at the centre of a fantastic inter-galactic conspiracy that did owe something to the Megadrive classic *Flashback*. And along with the obvious hi-tech weapons that 2023 would have to offer, bringing in the alien storyline gave Jo access to weapons and gadgets that



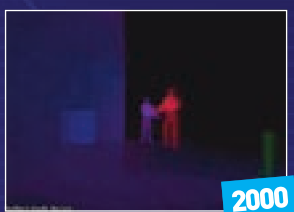
THE HISTORY OF HEADSHOT SHOOTING

GoldenEye was the first FPS to focuss on precision control and physics, which made headshots possible. But other games have followed and not all from the same company. The reason for this? Because after *Perfect Dark*, David Doak (who directed the second half of the project) left to set up Free Radical Design, a company that carried on the *GoldenEye/Perfect Dark* tradition while Rare wasn't watching. Here's a rundown of what others have spawned from the *GoldenEye* class of excellence.



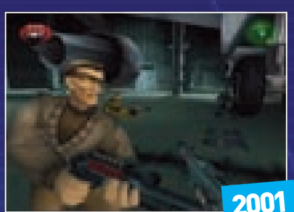
GOLDENEYE N64
RARE

This was such a masterpiece of game-craft that everyone on the PlayStation console fence lent over it, looked at this and either bought an N64 or started crying. Or probably borrowed an N64 from their mate. It made the laughably lame conversions of *Doom* and *Quake* on the PS look like unfunny jokes and proved it was possible to get first-person-shooting excellence from a joypad.



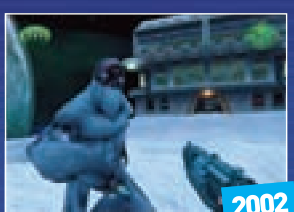
PERFECT DARK N64
RARE

Using an upgraded GoldenEye engine, you didn't have to play this for long to see that Jo Dark was ultimately James Bond's daughter. *Perfect Dark* was better looking than *GoldenEye* and had far more multi-player modes and customisability. It was a gigantic success, so much so that Director David Doak felt he now had the power to go it alone and instead of letting Rare take all the money from his genius work, he set up Free Radical Design.



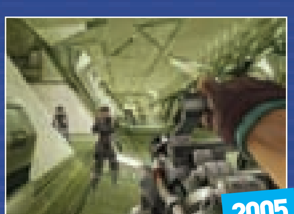
TIMESPLITTERS PS2
FREE RADICAL

The first of the *TS* series was undoubtedly great for its time and it took the mechanics of *GE* and *PD* and ramped them up for the next-generation of hardware (now old-gen). But many felt that it was a bit unfinished and suggested Free Radical rushed it out because the start-up company badly needed the royalties from it to get it on its feet. It made lots of money, giving FRD time to do a much better job on the sequel.



TIMESPLITTERS 2 All Formats
FREE RADICAL

On the PS2, this was far and away the best shooter on the system and easily one of the best games. It wasn't enough to topple the mighty *Halo*, but was different enough that most bought both. With superbly designed levels and a four-player split-screen that, for the first time, ran as smooth as a baby's backside rather than wheezing like an asthmatic ant. It sold outrageous amounts and racked up high scores in every videogames magazine.



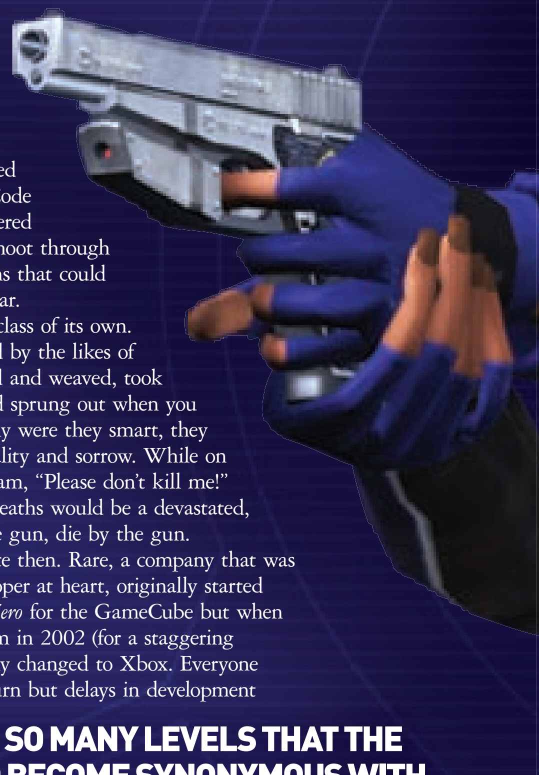
TIMESPLITTERS FUTURE PERFECT All Formats
FREE RADICAL

The biggest problem with *Future Perfect* was that, ultimately, it was using an engine that was starting to show its age. It felt more like a mission pack than a sequel, but it was still a cracking game that still earned respectable scores in every games mag. Many suggested it was time for Free Radical to evolve the *TS* series from here on, so it's likely they're redesigning the series from the core for any sequels.

PERFECT DARK ZERO 2005

PERFECT DARK ZERO 360
RARE

Zero is the cornerstone of the Xbox 360's launch line-up.



made anything in Bond's locker look as sophisticated as a spear and a Morse Code machine. *Perfect Dark* offered X-Ray guns that could shoot through walls and laser chain guns that could wipe out swarms of Skedar.

Even the AI was in a class of its own. While it would be bested by the likes of *Halo*, the enemies ducked and weaved, took cover while reloading and sprung out when you least expected it. Not only were they smart, they also had a sense of mortality and sorrow. While on their last legs they'd scream, "Please don't kill me!" and many of their last breaths would be a devastated, "Why…me?" Live by the gun, die by the gun.

It's been five years since then. Rare, a company that was always a Nintendo developer at heart, originally started developing *Perfect Dark Zero* for the GameCube but when Microsoft bought the firm in 2002 (for a staggering £324 million) that quickly changed to Xbox. Everyone was dying to see Jo's return but delays in development

"IT WORKED ON SO MANY LEVELS THAT THE SERIES WOULD BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH COMPLETE AND UTTER PERFECTION ALL THE WAY FROM THE N64 TO THE XBOX 360"

pushed it so far back that Rare came to the decision that it would rather have a 360 launch game than a swansong Xbox title. Never before has a game been jostled between machines so much, and with so much time spent in development, expectations were obviously sky-high. No released on the Xbox 360, *Zero* takes Joanna back three years prior to *PD* so we can explore her background and show players how she got involved with the Carrington Institute and why she turned into the perfect agent. Rare also wanted to flesh out the evil dataDyne's background and their rise to, er, Microsoft (okay, Starbucks) levels of global dominance and control.

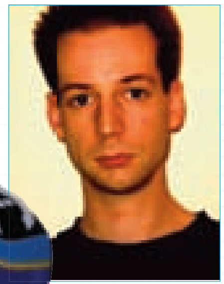
Where Jo's going after *Zero* hasn't been announced yet. Considering how long it took them to get *Zero* out, it'd be foolish to suggest there'll be a 360 sequel just around the corner. Let's just sit back and bask in the dark beauty of *Zero* now and let Rare plan out Jo's future (or past).

PERFECT DARK BOOKS

You know what it's like. You've invented this great world and a load of top characters but you want to flesh them out more. However, you can't make a game or a film for every chapter in a character's life, so you use other mediums to do it. *The Matrix* used mini-Manga films. *Robocop* used the Telly. *Perfect Dark's* gone book-bonkers and the adventures of Jo Dark have been given further depth thanks to one man – the word-mountain that is Greg Rucka (considered to be one of the big three at DC Comics). Published by TOR books, the first instalment, *Perfect Dark Initial Vector*, has already hit the shelves. It's set six months after *Zero* (and two and a half years prior to *Perfect Dark*) so you'd be off your head to read it before you play the game. We haven't, because it might spoil some of the story. And can you imagine if someone saw you reading it? You'd never be able to leave the house again. If you're a fan of books on games, then we're probably sure this might be a book that you'll like. As might the two others that have yet to be released.







Q&A

MARTIN HOLLIS

(DIRECTOR, PERFECT DARK, RARE)

Martin Hollis worked at Rare between 1993 and 1998: he directed GoldenEye and was the original Director of *Perfect Dark* until he left halfway through to go and work for Nintendo America. He's currently Managing Director of Zoonami, a Cambridge-based development house that he set up in 2000. It's been hard at work on upcoming music game *Funkydilla* but has a number of top-secret projects on the go. We caught up with him to get the real story of *Perfect Dark's* development.

Retro Gamer: Female leads had a strong presence in the nineties with Lara Croft leading the way. What were your main reasons for having a female lead?

Martin: We thought that it would be cool to have a heroine in a FPS, behind the camera. This broke all the rules. It would be as if 'you' were a woman. I have fond memories of Kim Kimberly (legendary secret agent and space navigator). She featured in Level 9's interactive fiction trilogy, and *Snowball*, where you, the player, experienced the shock of discovering that you were a woman, fairly late in the game if I remember. But there are other examples of female spies, which I have always found particularly fascinating – [such as] Dietrich's Agent X-27 in Josef von Sternberg's *Dishonored*.

Also I felt and feel there should be more games centred on women. Having just made a game starring a man it seemed logical to create one around a woman. We also wanted her to be quite normal, not with supermodel looks, perhaps a little androgynous.

Retro Gamer: What films /TV/books inspired the setting and plot of *Perfect Dark?*

Martin: Firstly characters. The suggestion "how about a woman?" was inspired by Kim Kimberly as mentioned. The character Jo Dark owes something to Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita*, and both strongly reference Jeanne d'Arc. Jo is iconic, heroic, independent, vulnerable and very damaged. Second to Nikita/Jeanne d'Arc, I think Dana Scully in *The X-Files* also had her influence. We decided against ginger, though. I note with interest that the new Jo has hair dyed incandescent orange, Leeloo style. The concept work is truly exceptionally beautiful But I can't imagine why she would wear the orange. It's uncharacteristic. Quite apart from the practical problem of being a beacon for bullets – Secret Agents don't wear orange for good reason.

For setting we picked a range of locations we thought would be impressive and architectural, on the model of *GoldenEye* but Sci-Fi dystopias. Dave Doak and I went through a Philip K. Dick phase at the time devouring everything PKD. The settings came first; the plot was then constructed by Dave to sew them together.

Dave coined "dataDyne" in a nod to Pynchon's Yoyodyne in the *Crying Of Lot 49*. There are certain plot similarities with the Yoyodyne of Buckaroo Banzai too.

One last enormous influence in terms of inspiration for character, setting and plot was *Ghost In The Shell*.

Retro Gamer: Why Dark? Is that just her surname, or is there a cryptic reason for her choice of name?

Martin: We liked the name. As to 'why' we liked it, each of us might give a different answer, but here's mine. Firstly I had a hope the gameplay would heavily involve darkness, a unique feature. Secondly the core activity was killing, making the game essentially nihilistic or destructive. 'Dark' communicates this bleakness of vision. (As does *Zero*, a suitable addition to the name.) Thirdly, black is my favourite colour, which is why I always wear it. Fourthly, Jeanne d'Arc is a strong female icon in history, vulnerable, feminine and yet capable of killing multitudes. Lastly, I think *Perfect Dark* was a game developer's game, which is why everything about it suits a game developer personality. You can see this echoed in Criterion Software's naming of *Black*. Game developers just like black, nihilism, dystopian futures, the number zero, infinity, spheres, perfection – all that kind of stuff.

As for the name of the game, the bad grammar 'Perfect Dark' appeals to me as interesting – perhaps it is my affection for the way the Japanese use English words in their own games and products. Also, it alludes to the possibility that Jo has no heart and is at sea without moral anchor or compass, much like the player of the game albeit within their virtual world.

Retro Gamer: At the design stage of *Perfect Dark,* what was the main focus of making sure it was different enough from *GoldenEye* to not be perceived as an unofficial sequel?

Martin: Certainly we wanted Perfect Dark to be different from GoldenEye, but mainly that was creative feeling not logic. Three years day-in day-out living with James Bond was enough for me. Even though I was and remain a huge fan of the films, three years was enough. I think we were all pretty sick of the Bond universe by the time we were finished, which is why we turned down the GoldenEye sequel without hesitation.

Retro Gamer: Looking back at Perfect Dark, what features did you have planned that didn't get into the end product?

Martin: I should say first that I was only involved for the first 14 months of *Perfect Dark*. The project lasted three years overall. My impression on playing the game once it was released was: what a vast array of features I never planned. This shouldn't be a surprise given the iterative development, which was natural, intuitive and accepted at Rare. But I admit I was surprised at the comprehensive range of multi-player options that made the cut.

In the beginning I had a hope that something really significant could be achieved with light and dark from a gameplay perspective. This is reflected in the name of the game. It was my hope that darkness could have been a pervasive gameplay feature.

But we quickly discovered we were challenging the N64 hardware. For example, Steve Ellis implemented a torch light but it didn't work well because of interaction between texture projection and perspective correction. First you have to have the right technology, then the gameplay becomes possible.

Frankly, I think this hope of mine was overambitious for that time. Even today, you can see game developers struggle to make light and dark foundational from a gameplay perspective. I suspect it will take a few years before significant and pervasive gameplay innovation occurs here. There are many problems to solve.

Retro Gamer: What was your favourite feature in the N64 original?

Martin: From a player's perspective, King of the Hill multi-player. As game developers we were very proud of the hover physics, and the visuals on some of the levels.

Retro Gamer: Do you still play Perfect Dark on the N64?

Martin: I'm afraid my N64s are buried under several generations of consoles. Will *Perfect Dark* be available on Revolution? I wonder…

Retro Gamer: Why did you leave Rare?

Martin: I'm not positive why; I just followed my heart. Maybe I left because I felt I had run out of challenges in that environment.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: JOHN PICKFORD

DATE OF BIRTH: 23 APRIL 1967

FIRST JOB: PROGRAMMER

CURRENTLY: GAME DESIGNER

FAVOURITE FILM: BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

PICKFORD BROTHERS

THEY'VE BEEN IN THE INDUSTRY FOR OVER TWO DECADES AND HAVE WORKED ON A STAGGERING 87 TITLES, STRETCHING FROM THE SPECTRUM TO PLAYSTATION2. THEY'VE PRODUCED GAMES FOR QUICKSILVA, MASTERTRONIC AND VIRGIN, WORKED WITH RARE AND NINTENDO AND ARE CURRENTLY ON THEIR THIRD STINT AS INDEPENDENT DEVELOPERS. THE PICKFORD BROTHERS KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT GAMES...

Mr Biffo has described them as 'dreamers and visionaries', but after spending an afternoon with them in a boozer in Buxton, I'm starting to liken John and Ste Pickford to those other famous sons of Manchester, Noel and Liam Gallagher. Both sets of siblings share a strong brotherly bond and a plain-talking, alcohol-fuelled, high F-word count style of banter that is massively entertaining. These brothers fight less, though. Oh, and *both* are talented.

As John starts to tell of meeting Miyamoto in Chicago – "It was before he had his media makeover and he was wearing a really bad Seventies suit, standing next to a giant inflatable Donkey Kong. Dead nice fella…" – it makes me realise just how far the boys have come from their humble beginnings in the grim identikit Northern town of Stockport, shivering on the outskirts of Manchester.



» Young John and Ste wait patiently for Sir Clive to invent a home computer

John was born in 1967, Ste joined him on Christmas day 1969, and as for most boys growing up in the Seventies, the emerging world of computers and videogames was mesmerising. Trips to Blackpool and North Wales had introduced the brothers to the joys of arcade gaming, and their local newsagents hosted some of their very early stabs at programming.

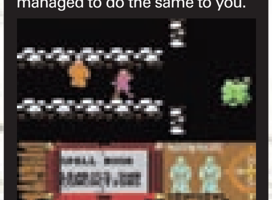
"We had no access to computers," they explain. "So we'd copy down listings from magazines in the library and rush to WHSmiths to type them in after school. We tried to get the bloody thing done before the shop shut and they chucked us out."

It must have been quite a relief, then, when John received a ZX81 for Christmas 1981 and thus had the luxury of saving those

YOU MUST PLAY...

Feud

Feud may not have been by the Pickfords, but it was obvious that they had been the brains behind it. The idea of the game was that you played one of two feuding wizards, who just so happened to be brothers, funny that… The aim was to travel around the maze-like landscapes in search of herbs that could be mixed together to create potent spells. Then it was simply a case of finding your brother and killing him before he managed to do the same to you.





DATAFILE

NAME: STE PICKFORD
DATE OF BIRTH: 25 DEC 1969
FIRST JOB: GRAPHIC ARTIST
CURRENTLY: BEDROOM CODER
FAVOURITE FILM: GOODFELLAS

"GHOST TOWN WAS A COMPLETE RIP-OFF OF ANOTHER GAME CALLED GREEDY GULCH. ALL GAMES WERE JUST COPIES OF PAC-MAN OR CLONES OF OTHER GAMES, SO I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT, BUT VIRGIN GOT LEGAL ACTION FROM THE AUTHOR"
JOHN PICKFORD

finger-numbing type-ins before they invariably crashed. Soon a jar in the kitchen bearing the legend 'John's Spectrum Fund' started to fill up with pennies, and when Sinclair's rubber-keyed beauty arrived, John's programming began to step up a gear. While still at school, he wrote a text adventure in Basic for the Spectrum entitled *Ghost Town*. The game was picked up by Virgin and became one of their very first releases in 1984, earning the sixteen year-old £500 and some back-handed compliments.

"This teacher at school kept saying, 'I hear you've won some money, John.' He just would not believe I'd written something, had got a contract and was getting paid. That's always grated with me."

Ghost Town may have been John's start in the industry, but it also had a profound effect on his career in another way.

"It was a complete rip-off of another game called *Greedy Gulch*," he confesses. "All games were just copies of *Pac-Man*, or clones of other games, so I didn't think anything of it, but Virgin got legal action from the author – quite rightly. Ever since then, I've been adamant I wouldn't do a clone of another game. A good thing really."

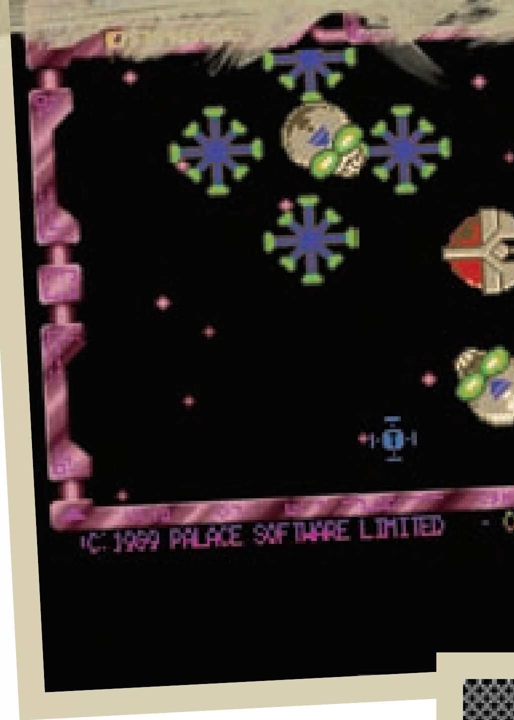
With an important lesson learnt, John teamed up with Dragon 32 owning mate, Paul Ranson, and the two produced an original graphical adventure game, *Ziggurat*, the following year, for Software Projects' budget label. Yet, at this stage, there was no thought of collaboration with the lad in the bottom bunk.

"My ambition was always to be a comic artist," says Ste. "We were both stay-in kids. I'd be sat with me drawing board over my lap in the armchair, doing comics forever, and John would be programming on the Speccy. We didn't think about pooling talents."

» The boys relaxing in their spiritual home and yes, that really is an *Elite* T-shirt Ste's wearing…

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



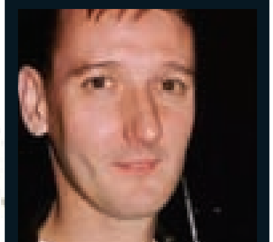
"WE WERE ONE OF THE FIRST JOBBING DEVELOPERS. YOU WERE JUST GIVEN A TITLE BY A PUBLISHER, TOLD TO HAVE IT READY IN TWO MONTHS AND THAT WAS IT. YOU HAD A TOTAL FREE HAND. THERE WAS NO CONCEPT OF 'GAME DESIGN'"

JOHN PICKFORD

DAVE WHITTAKER

While at Binary Design, for a time Ste's boss was none other than musical maestro Dave Whittaker, responsible for such memorable soundtracks as Lazy Jones (which he also programmed), *Glider Rider* and *Knight Games*.

'He was really nice and super professional,' remembers Ste. 'He'd write his own sound driver and give you the code to put in the interrupt. Music could really mess up your game if it was done wrong, but Dave would just look at you and say "No bugs in my code." And there never was.'



Ste's artistic efforts were certainly heading in a gaming direction though. He'd done a few Spectrum graphics for *Ziggurat* and would amuse himself of an evening by creating loading screens for whatever Speccy game he liked at the time, even taking care to accurately mimic the infamous colour clashes.

"I managed to get a week's work experience at Binary Design where John had just started working. It wasn't making the tea, it was, 'Could you do a loading screen for this game that's out next week?' They asked if I could do another week and I was, like, 'Fucking great – I'll phone the school!' I just wanted to stay."

Ste produced five loading screens in that fortnight, including ones for *Glass* on the Amstrad and *Hocus Focus* on the Spectrum, and his work impressed the bosses enough to slip him £50 out of petty cash and promise him a job once he'd left school (much to the disappointment of his art teacher and parents, who are still waiting 20 years later for him to 'get a proper trade').

John too was surging ahead, as the small studio took on commissions from big name publishers of the day. For Quicksilva, he produced *Glider Rider, Death Wake* and was then asked to work on a videogame version of cult TV show, *Max Headroom*. I wondered whether handling a licence restricted his creativity?

"Christ, no," answers John. "We were one of the first jobbing developers. You were just given a title by a publisher, told to have it ready in two months and that was it. You had a total free hand. There was no concept of 'game design.' I mean, you wouldn't make a movie without a script, or a record without a tune…"

Game design, or lack of it, is something the brothers would revisit, but back then they were in the thick of producing games to a strict deadline. Ste joined the company after leaving school, and had a big hit with his first job as lead artist. Previous darts sims had adopted a 'roulette wheel' approach to chucking your arrows, but the inventive *180* included a giant wobbly hand, which not only gave a more realistic representation of the sport, it graphically reflected the copious amounts of alcohol darts players would down between throws. Ste also provided the loading screen for John's *Glider Rider*, but their first true joint project – John programming, Ste doing the graphics – was Spectrum platformer, *Zub*.

Ste explains "We worked great together, even though we were still sharing bunk beds. And we quickly realised there were two ways of doing it. Meeting stupid eight-week deadlines, which made it impossible to make a decent game, or do a good game and fuck the deadline. Which didn't go down well with management."

John adds "We didn't want to do shit work. And if you look at the games being made in the same room, they aren't remembered, even though they were done on time. In five years, no-one remembers you were late."

Their commitment to producing quality games is nicely illustrated when they popped in and did some unpaid overtime on a Sunday to add in a 'silly little shoot-'em-up' called Lightfarce to the main game, despite *Zub* being a budget release for Mastertronic's £2.99 MAD range. (NB. Someone eventually separated out this day's work and it appeared on a *Sinclair User* cover tape under the title *Zarjas*).

By 1986, Binary Design had grown to a staff of 25 and was a hive of activity. The brothers paint a vivid picture of teams of programmers assigned to projects for the Spectrum, Amstrad and Commodore 64, meandering over to Ste and the other artists and musicians, and casually asking them if they could knock out a title screen or theme tune.

"Sometimes we'd wander round going 'Anybody want owt? Sprites?'" adds Ste, recalling his role as some kind of digital office tea-lady.

There was plenty of work and there were also plenty of game ideas floating about in the minds of the Pickfords, but with projects now taking 16 weeks, there simply wasn't enough time to realise them all. So John proposed what was a revolutionary idea at the time.

"We said, 'Why don't we come up with an idea, but that team writes it?' It was such an alien concept. So I wrote a two-page game spec for *Feud* and said we'd sell it to them. And they went for it – we pulled it off! I wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't the first time that happened in the industry. I did the same thing to Steve Wilcox, the boss of Elite. I pitched this idea for *A Fistful of Credits*, a bounty hunter game where you took on missions for cash, and he just looked at it and said, 'What's this?' That's stuck in my mind – he was the head of a pretty successful publishing company and he'd never seen a game design document. This was 1987. Before that, it'd just been people like us making it up as we went along."

The whole games industry was still immature, whether in terms of project management or employee rights. The boys left Binary Design to set up their own development studio, after being refused a larger share of the considerable profits being generated. John summons up a telling Dickensian analogy…

"There was a bit of a Fagin situation going on in them days. You'd get kids from school, starry-eyed about videogames, who'd work for peanuts… and then do free overtime! Nowadays, you get graduates who expect proper money, but this was the home computer age and with an endless stream of kids to farm, why should they pay us decent wages?"

But the impetus to set up Zippo Games in 1987 was more than just money. The factory-like grind of churning out 8-bit titles was



» Written whilst still at school, John opened his software account with the 'heavily influenced' *Ghost Town*



» The first true 'Team Pickford' game was tricky Spectrum platformer, *Zub*





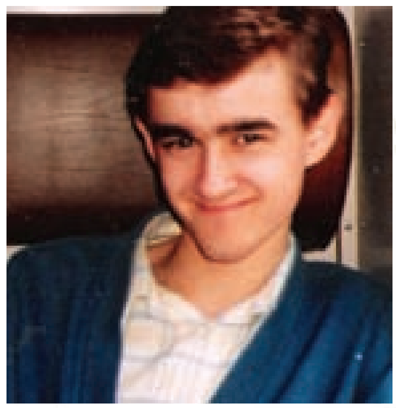
» The brothers step-up to the 16 bit machines with *Cosmic Pirate*, their first published game after setting up independently as Zippo.





» Tasteful shirts, urinating dogs and buxom barmaids. *180* was Ste's Stockport childhood all over again.

» Designed but not programmed by the Pickford's, *Feud's* tale of battling brothers was perhaps too close to home.



» Ste in 1987. Two decades in the games industry haven't aged him a bit…

disheartening when the shiny 16-bit machines were starting to make some headway. "The whole change to 16-bit was led by programmers, because we wanted to work with the new machines,' argues Ste. 'There were probably ten times as many Spectrums out there and I don't know if there ever was a big market on the Amiga and ST, but we were keen to work with this new technology."

So the fledgling company, taking its name from a long forgotten plasticine TV character who's gadgets were all supplied by the ACME-esque 'Zippo', began work on three projects – *Cluster* for Psygnosis, *RoadHugg*, a driving game set on a giant tube circling a planet, for Mastertronic, and *Cosmic Pirate* for Palace. Only the latter, a well-received blaster with some eye-catching visuals, was ever published. Undeterred, Zippo answered the call from the previously tight-lipped software house Rare, formerly Ultimate, who were advertising for developers to join them on some mysterious new ventures.

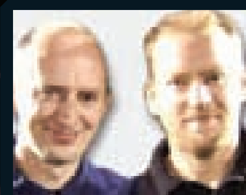
"I'd done my homework," John smiles. "I'd been reading up on Japanese business practice, because everyone was in love with Japan at the time. I knew you needed to put something on the table, so I'd got Ste to do some artwork, and I'd also heard you'd often get ushered into a room and left there alone. And there might be information about you in that room… "

"So, we go down to Rare HQ in Twycross and sure enough, we get shown into this boardroom, with clocks on the wall with 'New York' and 'Tokyo' above 'em. And we get left in this fucking room for 45 minutes, with just a folder in the middle of the table, marked 'Zippo'. Didn't phase me. Then eventually Tim Stamper marches in and was like, 'Where's your brother? Where's the artist?' He wasn't even at that first meeting, and it kind of worked – Tim fell in love with him, well, his art anyway, and he became the golden boy. We had a fantastic working relationship with them."

Indeed, Zippo was the only UK developer Rare chose to work with and the boys were asked to produce a sequel to the prestigious and successful *Wizards and Warriors* NES game. They were also introduced to some of the idiosyncratic working practices of the brothers Stamper (see The Rare Way).

With the boys inducted into the Rare fold and making good progress on their NES project, it seemed like heady days ahead for Zippo. But that was part of the problem. This was the height of 'Madchester' and with their office located next door to the legendary Hacienda club, Ste found dancing on E more attractive than coding in C. Steve Hughes, who'd followed the brothers from Binary Design and handled the business side of things, also went through something of a crisis, this time of confidence, and starts worrying about financial projections. John is left as a lone voice, urging for a little sanity and trying to steady the ship, but rough waters lie ahead for the Pickfords…

THE RARE WAY



ON GRAPHICS
"The Stampers still did everything on graph paper! Then they handed it to these secretaries to type in the numbers. The NES only had three colours per sprite, so they could do it in felt tips. I said to Tim Stamper, 'But these new machines are gonna have 4096 colours – where you getting the felt tips then?' He just looked straight back at me and said, 'I'll get them.' And you know, I think he must have. They seemed to move straight from graph paper and pens to digitised graphics with Donkey Kong Country and there was nothing really in between. Pioneers, those guys."

ON SECRECY
"They really drummed in to us that this NES project was top, top secret. They said we had to keep it in this little room, which had to be locked at all times and only the three people working on the project could go in there. And we couldn't talk to anyone about it. We just thought it was laughable, especially in Manchester where developers all knew each other. We'd be down the pub saying, 'Eh, we've got this secret thing we can't tell you about' but we weren't good at keeping secrets. Not in our nature."

ON GAME DESIGN
"They kept telling us how much better Japanese game design was. They took us to one side and said, rule number one – you can't have any bugs. We were like, 'Yeah, right, not possible!' Then the second rule was that everyone's got to be able to finish it. As opposed to just making it harder until it crashed, like on the Speccy. Suddenly, it was about making games that people could enjoy, not us showing off how clever we were and it meant a fundamental shift in our approach. Mind you, they also showed us the first *Zelda* and said, 'This is Miyamoto's rip-off of *Sabre Wulf*', cheeky bastards…'

NEXT MONTH...

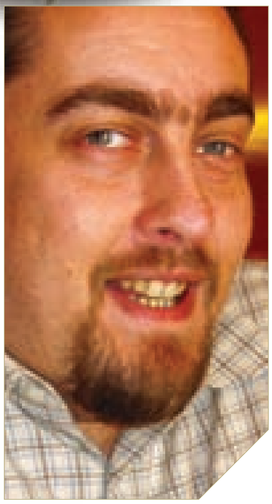
The boys see both sides of 'The Rare Way', get creative at Software Creations, meet Shigeru Miyamoto and go to a Japanese Strip Club*, give Mario a paint job and tell us the naked truth about their current project.

*Shiggsy may not have actually gone with them to said club.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?

JOHN PICKFORD'S DESERT ISLAND DISKS



ZELDA MAJORA'S MASK N64



"To my shame, I never completed this game. It's easily the best of the Zelda series with an incredibly intricate story and totally unique three-day mechanic. The only downside to replaying this would be going back to those sub 20fps frame rates."

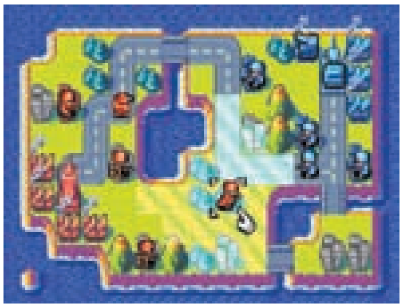
F ZERO X

N64



"This is probably my favourite racing game of all time. The difficulty curve is just perfect. Even a duffer like me could eventually win a few cups. I loved the graphics and the rock-solid 60fps frame rate. The way you interacted with the other 29 racers was inspired and much better than the disappointing GameCube sequel."

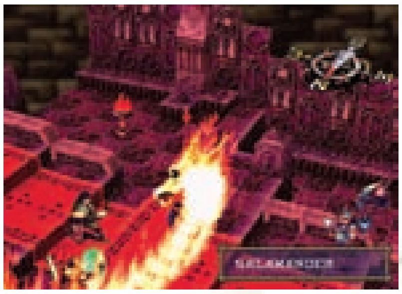
ADVANCE WARS GBA



"This game is a real time-sink. I couldn't tell you how many hours I spent with it. I was less impressed with the sequel though. The level design feature should keep the game interesting when the built-in maps have been exhausted (assuming I ever manage to beat the later levels). This game is an obvious influence for our current project, *Naked War*."

VANDAL HEARTS

PS1



"*Vandal Hearts* is a real classic. A brilliant turn-based tactics game, which never got over complicated or outstayed its welcome. This is the game that made us want to make *Pillage\ Future Tactics*."

MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH

GAMECUBE



"I'll go against popular opinion and pick this version as my favourite. I loved the one player mode and the multi-player stuff is just superb."

PIKMIN 2

GAMECUBE



"Another game I haven't finished but keep meaning to go back to. The original was a superb distillation of the real-time strategy genre for the console. The clever play control solved the lack-of-mouse problem wonderfully. *Pikmin 2* removed the 30 day limit which for me makes the game massively more accessible and allows me to take my time rather than feeling rushed. The random dungeons are a welcome addition too, proving a nice change of pace and style for the game."

ELITE BBC



"I never quite reached 'Elite' status but I'd love to try again. The game may be a bit simplistic by today's standards but I've yet to play a space combat\trading game that had a fraction of the atmosphere and immersion of the original *Elite*. I played the Spectrum version but I believe the BBC Micro or Archimedes versions were officially the best."

PAPER MARIO THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR

GAMECUBE



"An absolutely brilliant RPG – funny, charming and just downright entertaining throughout. Not many RPGs have a lot of replay value but I'd be quite happy to go through this one again. The whole wrestling-spoof chapter was worth the admission price alone. There aren't many games that keep me playing till four in the morning."

eMag



JETSTRIKE

DROP THE BOMB, DROP THE BOMB, ANYWHERE!



- **PUBLISHER**: RASPUTIN
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMIGA CD-32
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

Imagine a compelling hybrid of *Harrier Attack*, *Choplifter* and *UN Squadron*, add in a splash of rye humour, fanatical attention to detail, and a sublimely playable 2-D side-scrolling game engine and you have Aaron Fothergill's *Jetstrike*.

Today Jetstrike is a hidden retro gaming gem; largely overlooked when it was released in 1994, first for the Amiga, then ported to the ill-fated CD-32 console. Its fanbase is a bit like the last surviving members of the dambusters – rarely seen but fiercely loyal.

The joy of *Jetstrike* is in its simple air combat gameplay mixed with a dizzying array of real-life weapons, aircraft and over 150 missions. Fothergill clearly had a blast researching and recreating tiny versions of planes like the MiG 29, Tornado, F-15, Apache helicopter, Sea Harrier and F117 stealth fighter, coupled with hundreds of realistic scenery-smashing bombs and missiles.

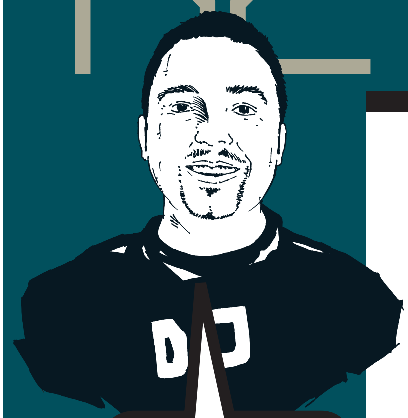
Players choose their steed, equip it with armaments and then take off from an allied base, skirting radar and hugging the jagged terrain of a constantly 2-D scrolling landscape to the target. Avoid the enemy defences (in this case, the sinister SPUDD forces) and then drop your load before limping back to base for a debrief. Sounds simple, but you've got to learn to deploy your weapons properly whilst the sky is black with flak, and of course there's the Amiga's jerky handling of the screen update to contend with, not forgetting eccentric controls which reverse when you turn around.

The basic VGA graphics convey the action perfectly and allow the finely-tuned gameplay to rule the show. Planes loaded with too much ordinance are noticeably sluggish, affecting your ability to avoid anti-aircraft fire and SAMs, and everything works – the swing wings, gattling guns, undercarriage and even afterburners. Hell, you even get little fire trucks spraying the wreckage with foam if you 'come in too hot.'

If you want to sample its delights today you're best off tapping eBay for an actual CD-32, because no emulator has ever done it justice.


L DISPLAY FAIL ---
UN
P1
P2
JET
STRIKE
SCORE
00005300
KILLS
TARGET
BASE

RETRORATED



With no Retro Gamer around for the last few months and Christmas rapidly approaching, we felt it was high time you received the low down on the plethora of compilations that are currently available. Just make sure that one of the better discs ends up in your Christmas stocking…

TAITO LEGENDS

INFORMATION



- » **FORMAT:** PS2, XBOX, PC
- » **PRICE:** £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-3
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** Battle Shark, Bubble Bobble, Colony 7, Continental Circus, Electric Yo-Yo, Elevator Action, Exzisus, Gladiator, Great Swordsman, Jungle Hunt, New Zealand Story, Ninja Kids, Operation Thunderbolt, Operation Wolf, Phoenix, Plotting, Plump Pop, Rainbow Islands, Rastan, Return of the Invaders, Space Gun, Space Invaders, Space Invaders part II, Super Qix, Thunderfox, Tokio, Tube It, Volfied, Zoo Keeper



Now this is very impressive. Taito Legends is easily one of the greatest treasure troves of retro games that we've had the pleasure of delving through. *Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands, Rastan, Operation Wolf, The New Zealand Story…* the hits just go on and on and on.

Many gamers' first port of call will most likely be *Bubble Bobble*, and to be honest, we can't really blame you. The trials and tribulations of Bub and Bob are as enjoyable today as they ever were; and as soon as you hear that classic theme tune you'll be immediately hooked all over again. Sequel *Rainbow Islands* is another popular classic, and while the main theme tune has been re-arranged (thanks to Taito loosing the original licensing rights) the rest of the game is pure gaming gold. The same holds true for *Zoo Keeper, The New Zealand Story, Rastan…* well, you get the idea.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Taito Legends* though is the sheer diversity that it offers. Platform fans are well catered for with the likes of *Elevator Action* and *Jungle Hunt*, while those with a gun fetish can blast away at *Operation Wolf, Space Gun* and *Return of the Invaders*, there's even a few scrolling fighters on offer; meaning that *Taito Legends* pretty much covers every base you can think of.

Of course, as great as *Taito Legends* is, it's far from being the perfect compilation.

» Never mind the fact it's nearly 20-years old, *Bubble Bobble* is still a joy to play

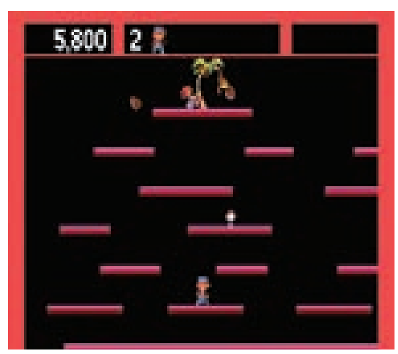




» You may not have had the pleasure of playing *Jungle Hunt* in the arcades; if you didn't you were missing out big time

There's no lightgun support for *Operation Wolf, Thunderbolt* and *Space Gun* so you have to make do with a cursor instead. While it works fine, it does detract from the original arcade experience. A bigger worry however, is that there have been several rumblings on various forums that many of the games (*Bubble Bobble* being the most notable example) are poorly emulated. While it's true that a different team worked on the UK compilation, we've not been able to see any massive differences ourselves. All we know is that the likes of *Zoo Keeper, Rainbow Islands, Super Qix, Tube It* and of course, *Bubble Bobble* remain just as much fun to play as they ever did, and at less than 50 pence a game, we're not arguing at all.

OVERALL **88%**



» Zoo Keeper is yet another hidden gem on this superb collection





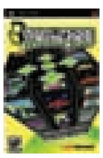
» The screen ratio is bad enough, but *Defender's* complex control system just isn't suited to the PSP

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY

INFORMATION



- » **FORMAT:** PSP
- » **PRICE**: £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** 720°, Arch Rivals, Championship Sprint, Cyberball 2072, Defender, Gauntlet, Joust, Klax, Marble Madness, Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat II, Mortal Kombat 3, Paperboy, Rampage, Rampart, Sinistar, Spy Hunter, Toobin', Wizard of Wor, Xenophobe, Xybots



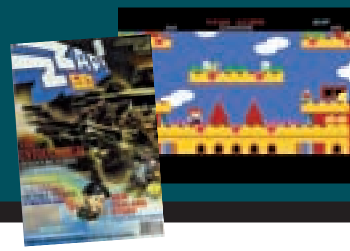
The *Midway Arcade Treasures* series has featured some superb titles over the last three years, so it's great to see that Midway has decided to release a handheld version. Sadly, it's not quite as good as we were hoping for, mainly because some of the best games from the first two discs haven't been actually included. We can understand why the amazing *Robotron: 2084* and *Smash TV* didn't make the cut (the PSP doesn't have the second analogue stick that's required for all that shooting) but that doesn't explain why *Narc*, *APB* and *Bubbles* weren't included. Hell, Digital Eclipse could have just used the face buttons for *Robotron* and *Smash TV;* after all, it worked okay for *Super Smash TV* on the SNES…

Personal gripes aside *Extended Play* still has its problems, many of which are down to the actual emulation. All three *Mortal Kombat* games run horrifically slow and are practically unplayable, while *Gauntlet* is made unnecessarily tricky by its unresponsive controls. It's a real shame, as the majority of games on offer play well and are perfectly suited to the PSP's screen. *Xybots, 720°, Klax, Championship Sprint, Paperboy, Wizard of Wor* and *Rampart* all run exceptionally well and have proven to be worrying timewasters this past deadline. Sadly, while many of the other games are just as playable, they've been ruined in the looks department because they've been stretched to fill the PSP's entire screen. As a result, titles like *Spy Hunter* and *Defender* look nothing like the original arcade games and have a bizarre, distorted look that's very off-putting. Quite why there isn't an option to play all games in their original aspect ratios is beyond us (Namco did in its *Battle Collection*).

Whilst there are some classic gems to uncover, *Extended Play* should be treated with caution, mainly due to its high price, and hit and miss emulation.

OVERALL **61%**





PAST WINNER

THE TOP GAME REVIEWED THIS ISSUE WHICH HAS BEEN AWARDED TOP ACCOLADES IN THE PAST

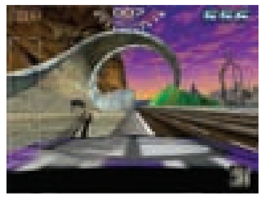
RAINBOW ISLANDS - AMIGA [1990]

It might have taken a while to sort out the rights; but *Rainbow Islands* proved to be well worth the wait.

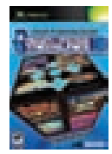
HIGHEST RATING
ZZAP!C64/AMIGA 53 **92%**

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 3

INFORMATION



- » **FORMAT:** PS2, XBOX
- » **PRICE**: £14.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-3
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** Badlands, Hydro Thunder, Off Road Thunder: Mud, Sweat 'N Gears, Race Drivin', San Francisco Rush The Rock: Alcatraz Edition, San Francisco Rush 2049, S.T.U.N. Runner, Super Off Road & Bonus Tracks Pack



If ever there was a case of diminishing returns, then Midway's latest compilation is the perfect example. The original *Midway Arcade Treasures* was a runaway hit and contained some of the greatest titles from the mid to late Eighties. A year later, a second sequel arrived, and while it still featured some strong titles, it was easy to see that a third title was going to need plenty of work. Sadly, Midway's third compilation is crippled by a weak selection of games and some extremely questionable controls. While *S.T.U.N. Runner, San Francisco Rush 2049* and *San Francisco Rush the Rock: Alcatraz Edition* were enjoyable to play in their original incarnations, these new versions share little of their magic. *S.T.U.N. Runner* is by far the worse culprit and features a questionable frame-rate and some overly sensitive controls. *Hydro Thunder* runs likes a lower resolution version of the excellent Dreamcast title (albeit with a lot more onscreen action) while *Off Road Thunder* and *Race Drivin'*, are instantly forgettable. *Badlands* and *Super Off Road* go some way to restoring the balance, but whatever way you look at it, Midway's third compilation is in desperate need of decent content. One thing's for sure Midway, we're going to want a much better selection of titles on our next compilation.

OVERALL **55%**

» Ah, *Badlands*. *Super Sprint* with guns – what more do you need?



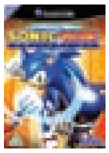
RETRORATED

SONIC GEMS COLLECTION

INFORMATION



- » **FORMAT:** PS2, GAMECUBE
- » **PRICE**: £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** Sonic CD, Sonic R, Sonic The Fighters, Sonic Spinball, Sonic The Hedgehog 2, Sonic The Hedgehog Triple Trouble, Sonic Drift2, Tails' Skypatrol, and Tails Adventures.

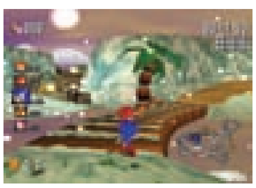


When the original *Sonic Mega Collection* was released fans were up in arms because it didn't feature the superb *Sonic CD* (seen by many as the pinnacle of the series). Luckily, Sega has seen sense and given PS2 and GameCube owners a chance to play one of its greatest Sega CD games. Filled with colour and featuring some wonderfully inventive level design, *Sonic CD* is one of Sonic's greatest outings and demands to be played till completion.

Sadly, the rest of *Sonic Gems* doesn't quite match the same standards… *Sonic The Fighters* may well be an exclusive port of the rarely seen arcade game, but that doesn't mean it's any good. Stuck between the *Fighting Viper* series and *Virtua Fighter 3, Sonic The Fighters* comes across as a rather tired beat-'em-up. While it's initially fun smacking the crap out of *Sonic and Tails*, the game's lack of depth becomes painfully apparent and you'll soon find yourself flicking through the rest.

Fortunately, *Sonic R* is more fun and while it's a port of the PC version of the Saturn hit, it remains extremely enjoyable to play. Each racetrack has a ridiculous amount of secrets to uncover and the soundtrack that plays throughout is utterly superb. Granted, it's rather easy to complete, but it's amazing fun while it lasts. Less enjoyable are the loathsome Game Gear titles that Sega has included. While they're interesting from a historical perspective, hardly any of them are actually enjoyable to play now. The fact that they've been blown up to fit a standard TV screen also doesn't help matters. Overall, they're simple space fillers, nothing more, nothing less. The end result is a compilation that even Sonic fans will be upset with.

OVERALL **61%**



» It may be easy to complete, but you'll love every minute of *Sonic R*



» *Sonic The Fighters* is all well and good, but where's SegaSonic?

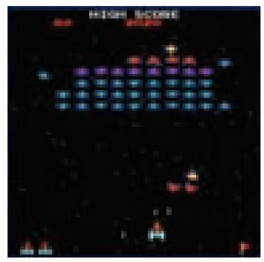




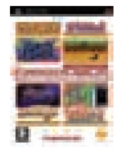
» Namco's arranged titles are surprisingly good, with *Pac-Man* being one of the better efforts

NAMCO BATTLE MUSEUM

INFORMATION



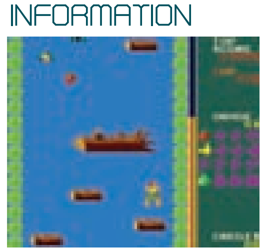
- » **FORMAT:** PSP
- » **PRICE**: £34.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Rally-X, New Rally-X, Dig Dug, Xevious, Bosconian, Rolling Thunder, Mappy, Tower of Druaga, Dragon Buster, Grobda, Motos, Dig Dug 2, King & Balloon, Pac-Man Arranged, Galaga Arranged, New Rally X Arranged and Dig-Dug Arranged



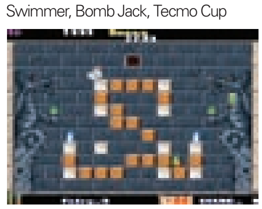
***Namco Battle Collection* is a tricky beast. Whilst it has a superb selection of games available for it, Namco insists on churning out the same old titles time and time again.** We've lost count of the amount of compilations we have that include *Pac-Man, Galaga, Dig Dug* and *Rally-X*, and now we have another to add to the collection. Luckily for Namco, many of the games are bona-fide classics and are still addictive as hell. Add to this titles such as *Rolling Thunder, The Tower of Druaga, Mappy* and *Motos* and the end result is an essential collection that neatly sidesteps all the problems of Midway's own PSP compilation. The most beneficial is the various display options that even allow you to tile the PSP through 90° so that you can enjoy the likes of *Pac-Man and Galaga* in their

TECMO CLASSIC ARCADE

INFORMATION



- » **FORMAT:** XBOX
- » **PRICE**: £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- » **GAMES INCLUDED:** Tecmo Bowl, Rygar, Star Force, Solomon's Key, Pleiads, Senjyo, Pinball Action, Strato Fighter, Swimmer, Bomb Jack, Tecmo Cup





Now this is one lazy compilation. We can understand why *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* has so few games (many of them are massive in terms of taking up disc space) but this is a ridiculously poor effort from Tecmo and Microsoft. Sure, it's a decent price, but so to are most of the other discs here, many of which have nearly three times as many games on them…

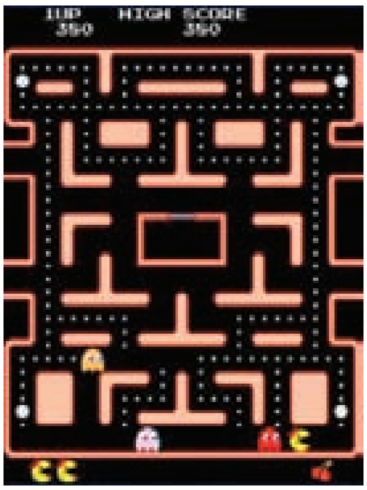
Considering its 'Classic' title, a fair number of Tecmo hits are missing. Granted, *Rygar, Solomon's Key* and the legendary *Bomb Jack* are still as great to play as they ever were (even if the Lady Madonna music from *Bomb Jack* is now missing), but it would have been nice to play the likes of *Gemini Wing, Shadow Warriors, Dead or Alive* and *Silk Worm* as well.

The biggest problem with *Tecmo Classic Arcade* is that there simply isn't enough content. While there are a fair few shoot-'em-ups to choose from, many of them are

original vertical orientations. Then you have the outstanding presentation and the newly arranged versions that update several classics with new visuals and gameplay enhancements.

Add in the fact that every title is perfectly emulated and it shows just how much care and attention has been placed on this fantastic little compilation. Okay, so we're not too happy about the loading times, and the price tag is a bit of a sore point, but if you're looking for a selection of arcade classics that you can play wherever you want, there really is no alternative.

OVERALL **80%**



» Girl Power rules. *Mrs Pac-Man* was a superb sequel and provided great new strategies for experienced players

basic beyond belief, with only *Pleiads* offering any actual longevity. Still, when you've got the likes of *Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key* to keep you busy, some purists will argue that that's all you need. Like *Bubble Bobble*, *Bomb Jack* is amazingly simply in execution, yet has a surprising amount of depth, while *Solomon's Key* is a joy to play through and will keep your brain busy for ages. Still, we're used to getting a lot more bang for our buck, and Microsoft's first retro effort is little more than a damp squib.

OVERALL **47%**





BIGGEST BUMMER

THE GAME TO AVOID FROM THIS BATCH WHICH HAS BEEN SLATED TO DEATH BEFORE!

S.T.U.N. RUNNER - SPECTRUM [1990]

The poor old Spectrum couldn't cope with this conversion at all and got a disgustingly poor score

LOWEST RATING
CRASH 85 **29%**

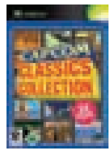
CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

INFORMATION



- **FORMAT:** PS2, XBOX
- **PRICE:** £19.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- **GAMES INCLUDED:** 1942, 1943, 1943 Kai, Bionic Commando, Commando, EXED Exes, Final Fight, Forgotten Worlds, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Gun Smoke, Legendary Wings, Mercs, Pirate Ship Higemaru, Section Z, SonSon, Street Fighter II, Street Fighter II: Champion Edition, Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting, Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Trojan, Vulgus

» And to think it's taken Capcom 16 years to come up with an arcade perfect port…



Over the years, Capcom has been responsible for some truly cracking titles, so it's pleasing to see so many of them included on one compilation. Of course, it's a bit cheeky that many of these games were previously (and recently in Japan) released on the PlayStation and Saturn, but Capcom has at least included a few extras to sweeten the deal.

The most obvious addition is the amazing *Final Fight*. It still plays like a dream, has simple, elegant gameplay and looks the absolute business. *Bionic Commando* is another worthy addition that features some tough gameplay and plenty of interesting play mechanics, while we've been waiting for a decent conversion of *Forgotten Worlds* since the Mega Drive version. The remaining new additions to Capcom's compilation include *Section Z* (the fore runner to *Side Arms* and *Forgotten Worlds*), *Trojan* (a rather basic scrolling fighter) and *Legendary Wings* (an interesting shoot-'em-up/platform hybrid). Not essential additions by any means, but when you add them to the rest of the games that Capcom has included, the end result is a very strong compilation that has something for everyone on it.

Granted, three versions of *Street Fighter II* may be a little too much (especially as its since been eclipsed by the superior *Third Strike*), but at least Capcom is being thorough by adding several other trilogies. Platform fanatics are treated to the *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* games, the *1942* games take care of the shoot-'em-up fans, while the likes of *Mercs* and *Commandos* deals with those that just want to shoot everything and anything. As with the Namco compilation, *Capcom Classics* is like returning to an old friend – an old friend with a superb arcade collection.

OVERALL **84%**

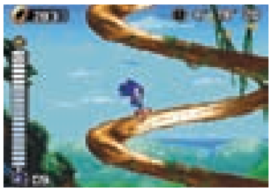


» *Bionic Commando* is still as tough as we remember. Thank god it's still great fun to play through



SONIC RUSH

SONIC'S BACK AND HE'S FASTER THAN EVER



- » **SYSTEM:** NINTENDO DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



Play *Sonic Rush* for a few minutes and it feels like an amazing return to form for the guys and gals at Sonic Team. Indeed, on first appearances, we were considering it to be the best Sonic title since *Sonic & Knuckles* (high praise indeed) and couldn't get enough of it. Now that we've been able to spend a lot more time with it though, *Sonic Rush*, while an impressive improvement over more recent Sonic games, still lacks that certain something to make it truly great.

Fortunately, those first few times you play definitely leave a favourable impression that allows you to persevere through the more frustrating sections (more on that later, though). For starters, Sonic himself moves incredibly fast through the well-detailed levels, and while he's been created with polygons, he still retains the character of his early 2D incarnations.

Sadly, new character Blaze the cat hasn't been given as much care and attention and looks decidedly ropey next to the far superior-looking hedgehog. Enemies are also fairly drab and show little of the imagination that was so abundant in the earlier Mega Drive titles. Luckily, the actual levels are typical Sonic, and deliver a vibrancy that we've not seen since the original games. Music throughout is also of a very high standard and will go down a storm with fans of *Jet Set Radio*.

Indeed, *Jet Set Sonic* may have been a more appropriate title, as the little blighter can reach insane speeds at certain points of the game. Add in the fact that the action now takes place over both screens (it's disorientating at first, but you soon get the hang of it) and it's hardly surprising that we sometimes found Sonic to be a little too fast for his own good. The biggest problem with *Sonic Rush* is that unless you've got the reactions of a hyperactive cat, you'll most likely fall victim to the many unfair drops that appear in most of the levels. Then, of course, there's the fact that you'll often lose all your rings before you've even registered what actually hit you.



» Ah, a Sonic game wouldn't be complete without a death-defying loop to race through



» The bar on the left allows you to 'rush' for limited periods of time. Use it wisely…



OPINION

Dang, that hedgehog is fast. Maybe I'm just getting old, but I found the little sod a bit too speedy. There's no denying that *Sonic Rush* is solid enough though, albeit a tad frustrating at times. I can do without new character Blaze and the goofy tricks, but the re-imagining of the bonus level from *Sonic 2* and the striking looking levels are more than welcome. A solid effort and an interesting new direction for the franchise.

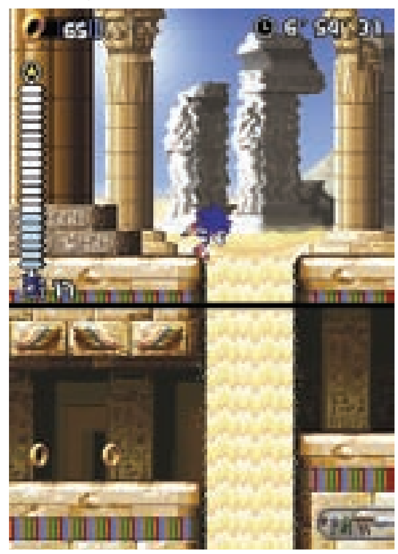
Damian Butt



OPINION

Funnily enough, I'm finding myself constantly playing *Sonic Rush*, and for me, it's one of his best games in an age. It's true that the drops can be annoying first time around, but once you've fallen victim to them once it rarely happens again (and besides, Damian's just rubbish at it). Add in a sublime multiplayer mode and some great (though repetitive) boss encounters and you have a great new Sonic title. More please, Sonic Team.

Darran Jones



» It takes a while to get used to using two screens, but once it kicks in, you'll wonder how you ever got by without them

IN SUMMARY

Sonic Rush is a marked improvement over *Sonic Advance 3* and the awful *Sonic Heroes*, but we still prefer his original Mega Drive outings.

RATING **80%**

MARIO KART DS

MARIO'S LATEST RACER LEAVES THE COMPETITION ON THE STARTING LINE



For many, the original *Super Mario Kart* has remained on a ridiculously high pedestal that has been all but unreachable by every kart game since. A few such as *Diddy Kong Racing* and Nintendo's own *Mario Kart 64* (we'll forget the so-so GameCube effort) have come close, but Mario's first karting outing remains his best. All that's changed, though, as *Mario Kart DS* not only captures the brilliance of the original classic but manages to inject it with a kart load of new ideas that leaves the much-loved SNES game spluttering on the starting line,

Of course, we could harp on about the fact that little is done to make use of the DS's two screens and that the game itself is a tad too easy, but we're just being churlish for the sake of it. No matter how you look at it, *Mario Kart DS* is utterly superb and has turned everyone at *Retro Gamer* into grinning loons. While the purists on the team were a bit concerned about the new turbo boost technique it is arguable that it adds a whole new level to the gameplay and also makes Time Attack a joy. There's still a sense of the cheating AI that has been with the series since the original SNES game, but it's better balanced here and still allows skilled players to make decent headway into the game. The 50 and 100CC tournaments are predictably slow, but hey, that's Mario Kart, you'll just have to learn to live with it, and let's face it, you've probably all gone straight to 150CC anyway.

One nice touch is that *Mario Kart DS* features a Retro Grand Prix. All right, so Game Boy Advance and GameCube tracks aren't exactly old, but the sentiment's nice and it brings with it a charming air of familiarity. For all its enjoyable single-player modes (challenge mode is a wonderful addition), it's the multiplayer where Mario Kart has always shone and this DS outing is no exception.

Darran Jones



OPINION

I'm a huge fan of the original SNES game, but this DS effort simply blows it away. Nintendo has essentially taken every great element from the last four Mario Kart games, cut out all the crap and simply served us up with some quality gaming. Add in an amazingly addictive multi-player experience and the end result is another essential DS title that you'd be mad to miss.

Dan Curley



» Donkey Kong returns and reveals that he's still a great racer



OPINION

I found *Mario Kart: Double Dash* to be rather disappointing, so I was a bit concerned when the DS version was announced. Luckily, it's turned out to be utterly brilliant and has caused all sorts of upset in the office (mainly because I keep winning all the multiplayer sessions). Where's the wonderful feather, though?

Simon Phillips



» The new challenge mode is a great way for honing your skills

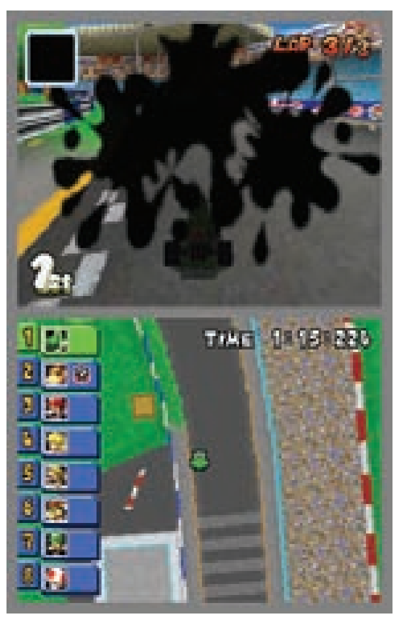
IN SUMMARY

We've had some wonderfully tense races in the office and the ability to play against other DS owners online is the final icing on a wonderfully sumptuous cake. Utterly superb.

RATING **92%**



» The new addition blooper doesn't work too well because you can simply use the bottom screen to work out where you are going



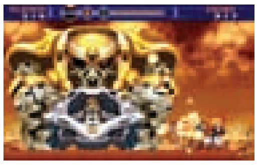
» The screen may be filled with ink (use a boost to remove it) but you can still steer by just looking on the bottom map. Doh!



- » **SYSTEM:** NINTENDO DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-8

GUNSTAR FUTURE HEROES

13 YEARS IN THE MAKING; AND BOY, DOES IT SHOW



» **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
» **PRICE:** £24.99
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PUBLISHER:** THQ
» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
» **PLAYERS:** 1

» If you thought you'd seen everything the Game Boy Advance had to offer then prepare to be amazed



Wow – that's the first thought that goes through your mind upon playing Treasure's latest blaster for the very first time. After cutting its teeth with the likes of *Astro Boy* and *Advance Guardian Heroes*, Treasure has finally found its feet with the GBA's hardware and released a staggering tour de force that delivers some of the most breath-taking visuals that Nintendo's greatest handheld has ever seen.

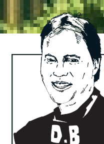
Red and Blue, Gunstar's main characters are animated to perfection and will bring back nostalgic twinges to anyone that played the original Mega Drive classic. Enemies too are instantly recognisable and the entire game not only pays homage to the original, but also gives a cheeky nod to plenty of past Sega hits. One stage sees you running through a rotating maze, capturing Flickies and avoiding the its many enemies, whilst another is a direct lift of helicopter blaster *Thunder Blade*. Best of all though, is the stage that sees you tearing across an *Afterburner*-styled landscape and fighting off a huge number of missiles and enemy fighters. It's jaw-dropping to look at and instantly captures the pure adrenalin rush of the Sega of old – not a bad achievement by any means.

For all its glorious visuals and outrageous looking bosses (some of which are simply incredible to behold), Treasure hasn't forgotten that all-important gameplay. Rather than produce something that is completely new, *Gunstar Future Heroes* is more of a re-imagining of the Mega Drive hit. As a result, stalwart fans of the original may find many of the bosses and locations a little too familiar. Everybody else though will discover a hectic rush of adrenaline that has all the highs and lows of a typical shooter. The levels may be fairly easy to get through (unless you're playing on the unfeasibly tough higher difficulty settings) and the replay value isn't quite so high as we would have liked, but this is still a quality shooter that comes highly recommnded.

Darran Jones



» There are plenty of references to classic Sega titles, with this nod to classic Mega Drive game *Flicky* being one of the most instantly recognisable

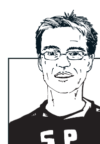


OPINION

Thanks to all the recent DS titles that have come out, I have been rather tight with my GBA purchases. All that's about to change though, as *Gunstar Future Heroes* is utterly fantastic and easily Treasure's best GBA game. It's a bit of a shame that *Gunstar's* unique weapon system hasn't made the cut, but everything else is utterly top, and you have just gotta love that *Afterburner* stage!

Damian Butt





OPINION

There's no denying that this is a great little blaster, but I was hoping for something with a little more substance. While the level design is impressive, it feels just a little too similar to the original game. It's also way too short, and while I enjoyed playing through it, it's not something that I'd generally go back to.

Simon Phillips

IN SUMMARY

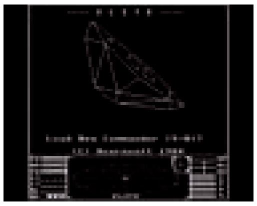
Gunstar Future Heroes may be a brief experience, but its wonderfully tight controls, terrific level design and stunning visuals are more than enough compensation. Let's just hope it doesn't take Treasure another 13 years to come up with a sequel…

RATING **82%**

eMag

ELITE

MOSTLY HARMLESS



- **PUBLISHER**: ACORNSOFT
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** SPACE ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ACORN ELECTRON
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

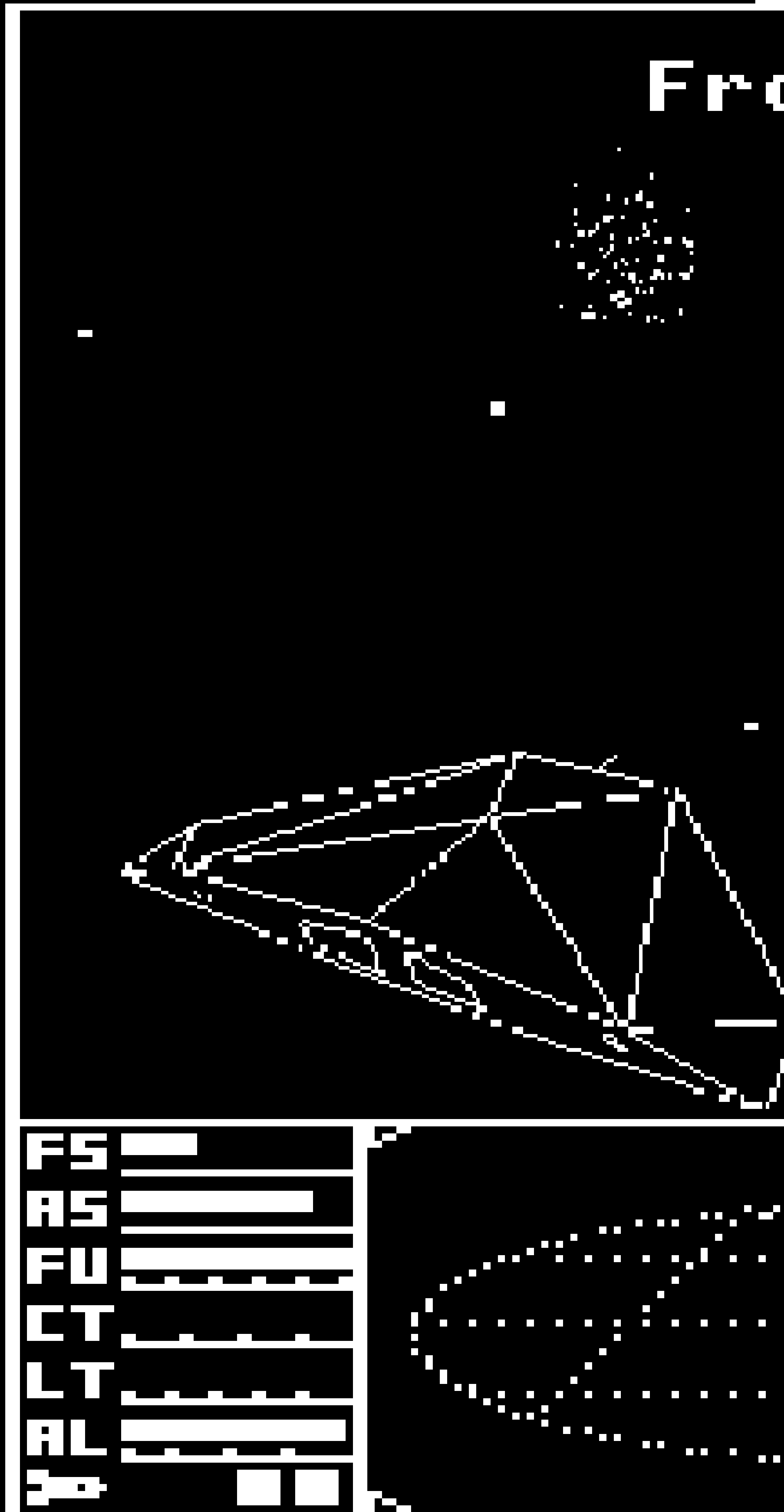
It's a testament to the sheer potency of Bell and Braben's *Elite* that even if you had the paltry Acorn Electron game you were still hooked from the moment your Cobra MKIII emerged from the Lave Coriolis space station and out into the big black. Compared to the all-conquering BBC disc version this insulting bare bones port lacked any special missions, no Blue Danube, a seriously pruned ship list, and it didn't even feature any suns for Chrissakes!

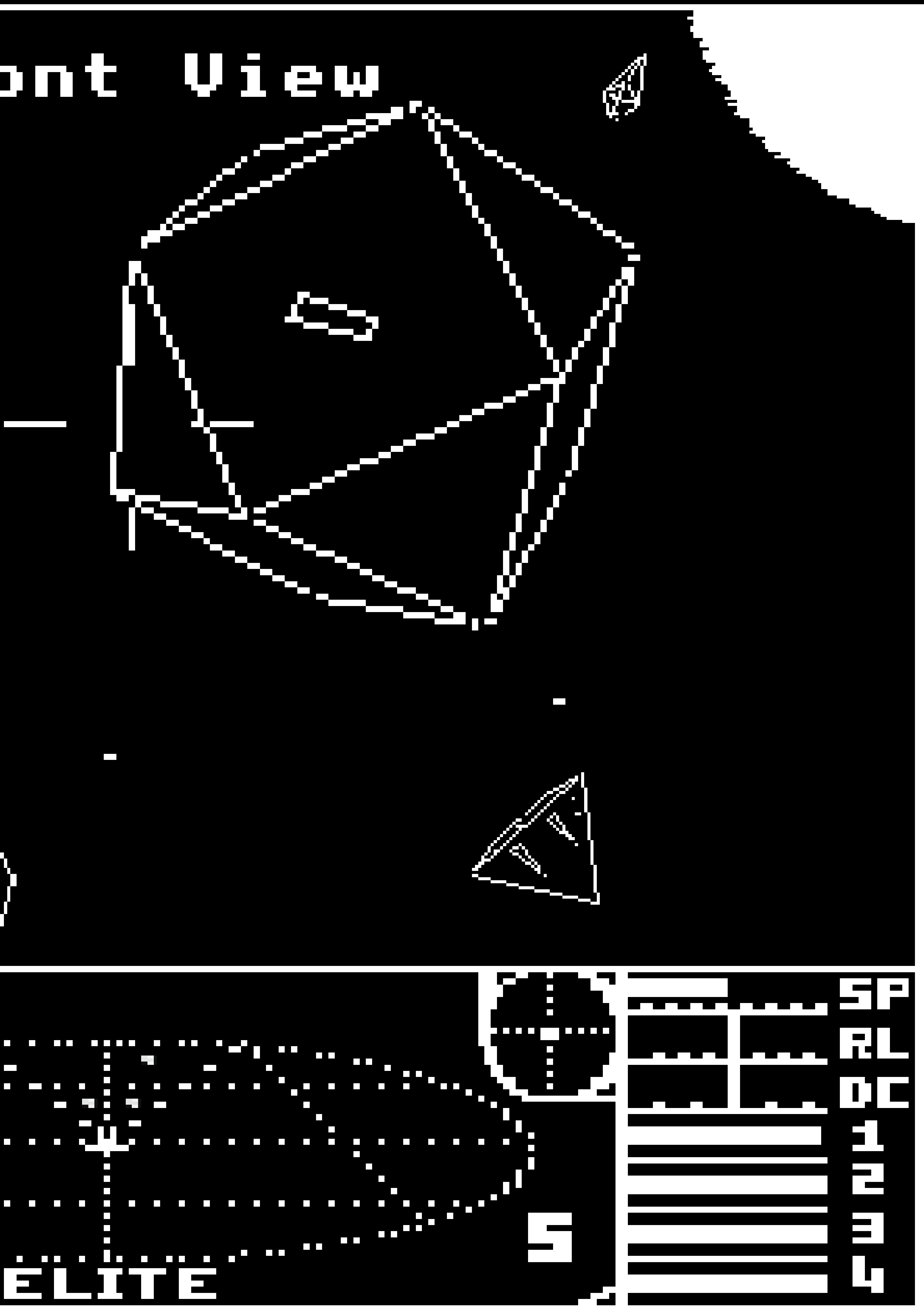
But it was still special.

Perhaps more than any other single game *Elite* has dominated my game time over the last 21 years, ever since Christmas 1984 when to my astonishment the last present in the sack was not a *Return of the Jedi* Speederbike, but the lavishly presented Space Trader's Flight Training Manual accompanying the white label cassette. My friend Bill Hearn was right, this *was* the best game I would ever play.

Even today *Elite* still stands proud as a supremely playable space trading adventure; its quaint wireframe graphics allow your imagination to run riot, and the open-ended gameplay leaves you free to explore space as a pirate, a trader, a miner, a rogue, a hero or a bounty hunter. I like the fact that not just anybody can handle the flight controls, you have to put the effort in. There's the technical genius of the scanner, the trading element, which teaches you the value of money, the intense ship-to-ship combat, and that terrifying shriek as enemy lasers penetrate your raw energy banks prior to detonation.

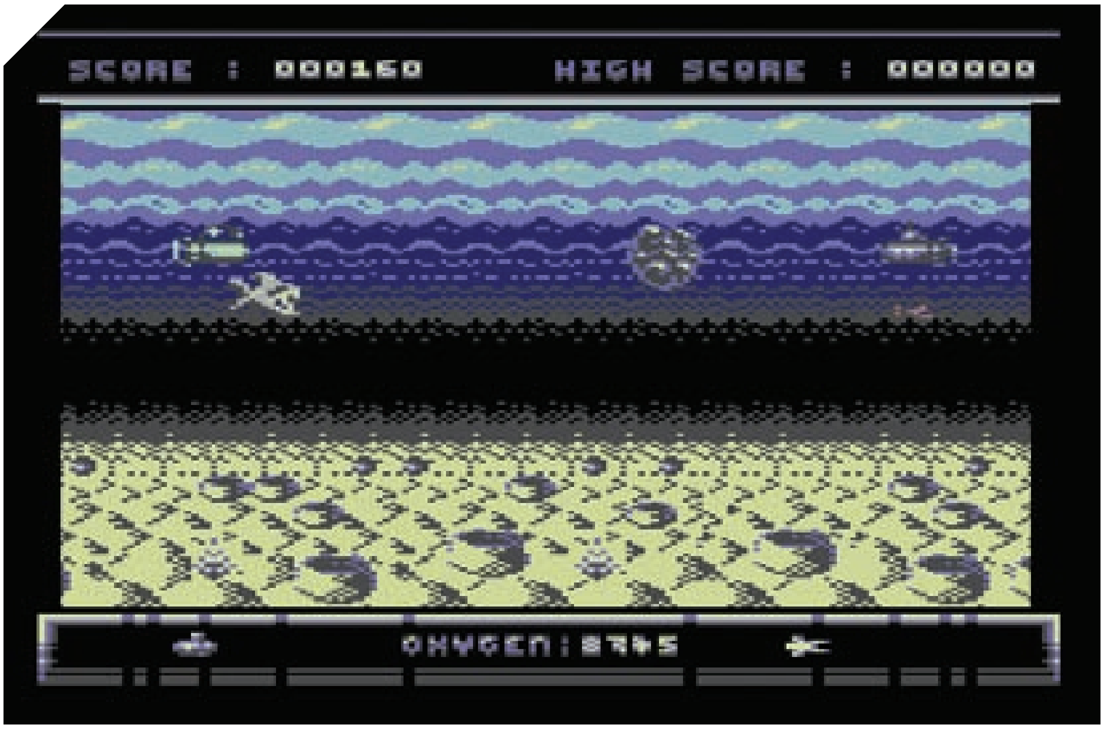
Since '84 countless iterations have been released – BBC, Spectrum, Amstrad, C64, Atari ST, Amiga, NES, and even (whisper it) a distinctly nefarious Game Boy Advance version, and despite only minor differences to the basic formula, diehard fans typically own three or four versions on various formats. The Acorn Archimedes version is generally accepted as the best amongst purists simply because it's the ultimate evolution of the species. Whilst technically it is 'the daddy', in my experience, the best version is always the one that first took your breath away…




ont View
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ELITE

RETRO SCENE

TO MARK RETRO GAMER'S RETURN, OUR INTREPID REPORTERS HAVE BEEN OUT GATHERING THE LATEST NEWS AND HAPPENINGS FROM THE HOMEBREW SCENE...



» *Sub Hunter* is still a way off but it's already looking rather special

PROTOVISION REVEALS NEW TITLES

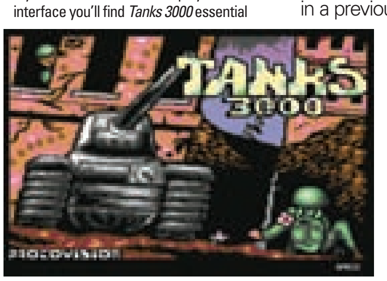
NEW FOR OLD

After all of these years, new software for our favourite home computers is still very much happening, thanks, in part, to the evolution of emulation. This provides developers a quick and useful way to create software and also get the very most out of the technology both virtually and 'in the flesh', so to speak. Starting with the Commodore, here's what's pending from the software co-operative Protovision.

Aside from Jim Slim (which is reviewed this issue), PTV is readying the superb strategic war simulator *Advanced Space Battle* (ASB) for release, as well as *Tanks 3000* reviewed in a previous issue of *Retro Gamer. ASB* is by Jan Böttcher and has taken a few years to design, as Böttcher wanted to make the game for himself, and something that would appeal to people who wish to partake in virtual war-mongering. Böttcher explains, "Since such games are developed in one's leisure-time, the typical pressures of professional life (deadlines, budgets, etc) hardly affect its development. You have all the time you want, and you can do what you like. Therefore, it is essential to find a good balance between the scope of the project and the time and effort you want to spend on it – if my plans were too ambitious, the game would have never be finished." *ASB* will be available in early 2006, and can be played by up to four players.

There are two other C64 games on the horizon, and both a looking very nice indeed. And because they are co-op productions they'll end up as free downloads. The first is *Sub Hunter*, programmed by Richard Bayliss and Jon Wells, with graphics by Frank Gasking. This is something of a remake of the original game from Mastertronic, and deals with many of the original's problems. There's some smart parallax scrolling in the available preview, as well as a fast and responsive game engine. You can download the latest playable demo from www.redesign.sk/tnd64/s.html, and for those who'd prefer to play the final version on a real C64, there's talk that it could be available from Cronosoft (www.cronosoft.co.uk) for a couple of quid.

» If you have access to a four-player interface you'll find *Tanks 3000* essential



The final C64 production of note is *Pinball Dreams*. Once again a group effort, it's a legal port of the original Amiga game, featuring two of the original tables to play. The quality of this has rarely been seen on the C64, though it's not finished, it's looking extremely promising and is bound to receive much praise when it's eventually released. The latest demo can be downloaded from www.interstyles.nl/pd.d64.

DON'T FORGET THE SPECCY

THE SPECTRUM GETS A COUPLE OF NEW GAMES AS WELL...

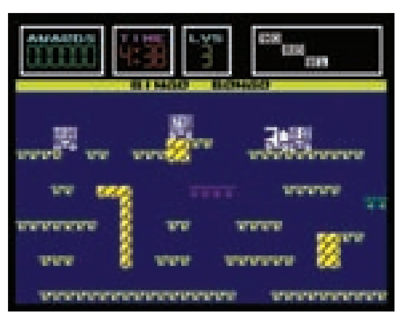
Of course, the C64 isn't the only machine to enjoy such a wealth of new games. Most of the popular formats from yesteryear are all enjoying new developments at some level, and everyone's favourite rubber-keyed monster is no exception, thanks in many cases to programmer Jonathan Cauldwell.

Cauldwell's latest productions include the excellent game *Turbomania*, a top-down and rather warped *Rally-X* clone that includes some fun and playable mini-games between levels. It works on all varieties of the Speccy, including the 16K machine, and can be downloaded from Cauldwell's website at http://members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/

Cauldwell's second game to have sprung from his wacky genius is the seminal *Loco Bingo*, combining platform action, mental arithmetic and bingo for the first time in one game. Loco Bingo will soon be ready for release from Cronosoft at a bargain budget price.



» Crikey, more games from the talented Mr Cauldwell. Does the man ever get a chance to actually sleep?



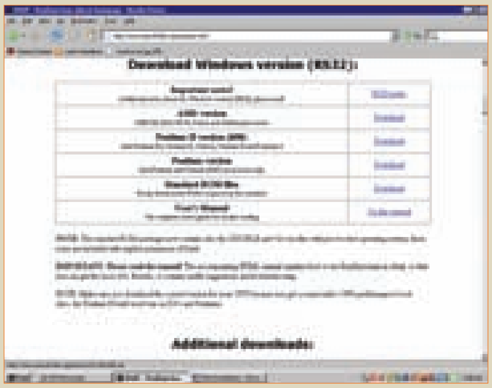
» More Spectrum insanity to look forward to. This is the utterly bonkers *Loco Bingo*

EMULATE THIS

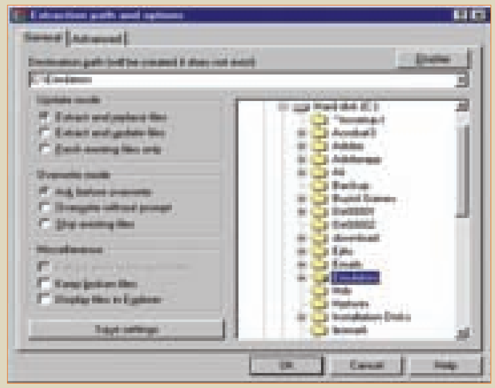
EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL BE GIVING YOU A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF EMULATION. TO TIE IN WITH OUR FEATURED MACHINE, THIS MONTH IT'S THE MARVELLOUS ZX SPECTRUM

real spectrum

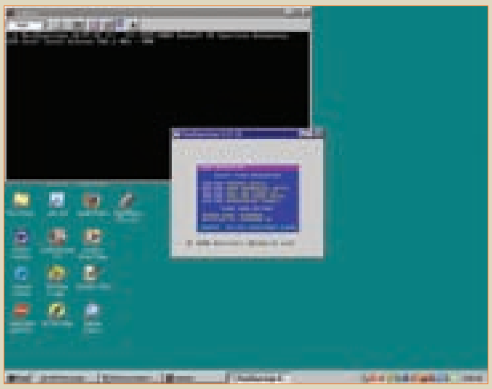
The ZX Spectrum is probably the most emulated computer on this planet, boasting more emus than any other machine. So, you've got a lot of choice when it comes to recreating Sir Clive's fames machines, however we'd like to introduce you to *Real Spectrum.*



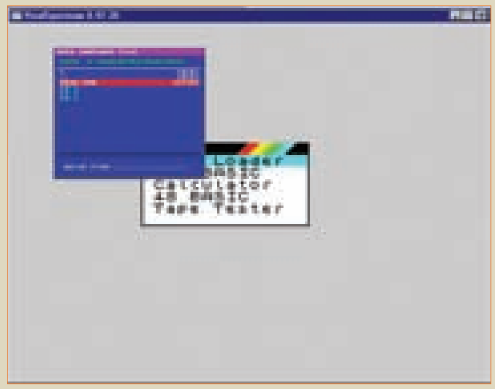
STEP 1 The first thing that you need to do is download the emulator from its homepage at www.ramsoft.bbk.org/realspec.html. There is a specific version for you to download according to the processor and hardware that you have, so ensure that you get the right one. The next thing is to download the ROM image, which will be needed to get the emulator working.



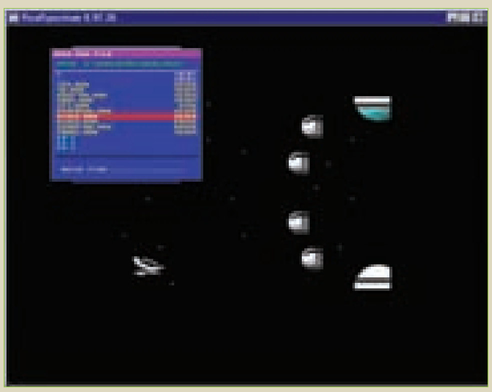
STEP 2 Unzip the files into it's own directory using whatever methods you usually use. Ensure that all of the ROM files go into the same directory as the emulator. Now double click on the RS32 icon. It will automatically open up in a window with the familiar Spectrum 128/+2 opening screen.



STEP 3 On PC screens set at 800x600 pixels or higher, the screen may seem small. By pressing F11, it will allow you to alter the size of the screen to differing resolutions between 320x200 pixels to 512x384. You may also toggle the screen mode between windowed (default) to full screen, or you may double the size of the window output by setting the Blitting FX mode to Pixel Scaler x2 or Vector Scaler x2.



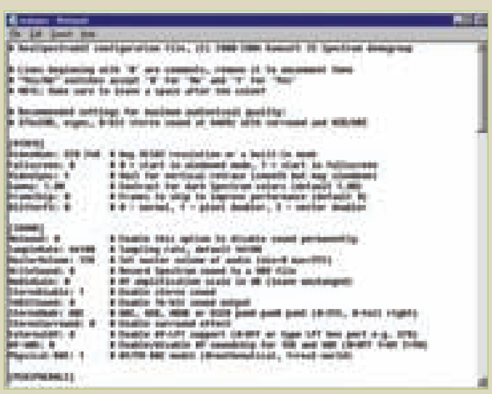
STEP 4 So, you're ready to load your first game? Pressing F7 will open the tape dialogue box, and F5 will allow you to load snap shot images, these are determined by the file extension (.tap and .sna respectively). Select the game you want to load by highlighting it and pressing ENTER. Press ENTER again and the game will be loaded in an instant.



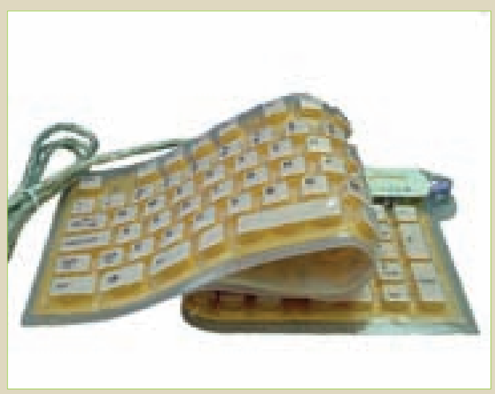
STEP 5 If your game requires a specific model, press F3 and a list of specific Spectrum models will be listed. On changing the model, you may be asked to change the associated ROM file to suite your needs. All Spectrum revisions are supported, as well as some popular Russian clones, the Dadaktik Kompakt, Pentagon and Scorpion. Disk images are supported natively with these and the +3 if selected.



STEP 6 If you want to cheat in a game, press F9 and enter the relevant poke code. F4 allows you to select keys to emulate a joystick or configure the mouse or PC joystick. ALT + F2 will reset the machine at any time, F12 will adjust the volume controls and F10 will quit the emulator. Pressing F1 will list all key functions available in Real Spectrum.



STEP 7 For advanced users, the file realspec.ini (located in the emulator folder) can be edited in Note Pad so that you may set your own default settings. Always remember to back up the file somewhere before making any changes, then if you ever want to revert to the default quickly, you can remove your edited version and copy back the original file to *Real Spectrum's* host directory.



STEP 8 For that final authentic feel to *Real Spectrum*, you can make it more real by replacing your chunky plastic keyboard for an 'almost everything-proof' foldable keyboard. These are available in several colours and can be purchased online and at all good retailers. This will give you the responsiveness that you crave when playing your favourite games of old.

NOTE: THIS GUIDE IS FOR THE WINDOWS VERSION OF REAL SPECTRUM, BUT THE PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE THE SAME FOR ALL VERSIONS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE THE INSTRUCTION FILE INCLUDED IN YOUR DOWNLOAD.

RETRO SCENE

Remake of the Mouth

EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL REVEAL A CLASSIC HOME BREW TITLE THAT MAY HAVE PASSED YOU BY. THIS MONTH IT'S THE RATHER EXCELLENT MONTY ON THE RUN V1.0

MONTY ON THE RUN V1.0

LOOK OUT MONTY! - WILL OUR MOLE GET TO SAFETY?



- **FORMAT:** PC
- **RELEASE DATE:** 2004
- **DEVELOPED BY:** TREVOR STOREY AND SCOTTIGE WEB
- **LINK:** WWW.REMAKES.ORG
- **REVIEWED BY:** SHAUN BEBBINGTON



» We thought wacky enemies like these were a thing of the past.

If you couldn't guess, this is a remake/tribute to the greatest game in the Monty Mole series by Gremlin Graphics. *Monty on the Run* saw our hero trying to escape from the law to a land where he could not be extradited, and in the original, you'd needed to select the items for Monty's inventory to help him escape, a gas mask and passport, for instance. Sadly, this has been omitted from this new update, however everything else is there, from the familiar 'loading' screen to the seminal musical scores from the infamous king of SID Rob Hubbard. The title and in-game music is by the SID tribute band Press Play on Tape, while the game over and high-score music is taken directly from the C64 game; all of which will be instantly recognisable to anyone who played the original. The end result is a game that brings about a warm and cosy feeling of nostalgic joy.

So, with the presentation and audio acting the part, how does it actually play? Slightly different to the C64 version (upon which it is based) in the way that Monty jumps from pipe to pipe, and there's a hidden 'Thank you' screen to find, but this is *Monty on the Run* in every other way. The fast and dynamic movements of your foe are still there, with each screen given a lick of binary paint; adding a welcome splash of colour, as are all of the sprites (if you can call them sprites on the PC). This doesn't take anything away from the whole experience, as the 'aesthetic enhancements' are more sympathetic that you'd think.

Finally, the all-important game mechanic is fully intact – yes, this really is *Monty on the Run*, just with minor changes mentioned, and you don't have to wait six minutes for it to load, and it feels like you should have a clicky and chunky joystick in your hands. If any retro purists ask why PC games aren't as good as the games of old, point them in the direction of the remakes scene and do us all a favour, won't you? Especially this gem.

RATING **83%**

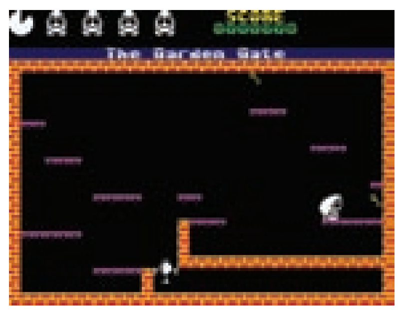
TWO-MINUTE PROFILE
JONATHAN CAULDWELL

RETRO GAMER TAKES TWO MINUTES TO SPEAK TO ZX SPECTRUM SUPREMO JONATHAN CAULDWELL, THE SECOND MOST ACTIVE PROGRAMMER IN THE SPECCYS LONG HISTORY. WELL, SECOND COMES RIGHT AFTER FIRST, DOESN'T IT?

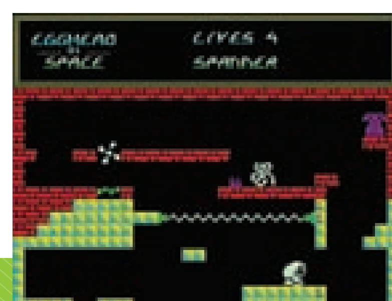
Jonathan Cauldwell is probably the best-known active home-brew programmer currently around. Renowned for his software engineering, original ideas and generally high-quality productions, he's amassed something of a fan-base, with his most successful recent product being Platform Game Designer released in mid-2005. His roots, like so many of his peers, started back in the Eighties. As he recalls, "I started writing games in the late Eighties. In 1989 I wrote what is probably my best-known game, *Egghead*, a 40-screen platform game in a style not unlike *Manic Miner*. I then went on to write games for all three Spectrum magazine cover tapes as well as one or two software houses that most people have never heard of."

Egghead would be the start of a long love affair of the machine's quirky hardware, even after its commercial death, and as Cauldwell continued, he surpassed many developers in terms of sheer quantity and quality. "After the final Spectrum magazine closed down in the summer of 1993 I continued to write games for the machine, and more recently have written games for Cronosoft and Retro-Soft. According to the World of Spectrum website, only the Shaw brothers have now written more Spectrum games."

So, how did it happen that his productions were commercially available again on real-media? It was thanks to the World of Spectrum forums, of course, "It began when Simon Ullyatt posted a message on the World of Spectrum forums early in 2003. It was his intention to publish new games for 8-bit computers and he was looking for programmers of any such titles. By a happy coincidence I had just written *Egghead in Space*, the third in a series that began many years ago with a couple of Crash cover tape games, so the timing could not have been better. *Egghead in Space* became the first Cronosoft title to be published." For Cauldwell, it's about producing games that people enjoy. As he says, "I just feel honoured that people still want to play my games." And we're extremely glad that he still writes them.



» If you like *Manic Miner* you'll absolutely adore this homage by Jonathan Cauldwell



HOMEBREW RATED

Home-brew, love it or hate it, you can't deny that it's becoming an important part of the retro scene. *Retro Gamer* takes a look at some of the newest releases available.

MOVE OVER RICK DANGEROUS?

JOE'S ADVENTURE

- » **FORMAT:** 64K ATARI 8-BIT (EMULATOR IMAGE)
- » **RELEASE DATE:** NOVEMBER 2005
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** PIOTR WISNIEWSKI AND MATEUSZ WISNIEWSKI
- » **WEBLINK:** WWW.ATARI.SK/DOWNLOAD/JOE.ZIP
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** SHAUN BEBBINGTON



***J**oe's Adventure* **starts with a functional introduction sequence outlining the brief storyline of an ancient pyramid built for the sole purpose of hiding a great Pharaoh's treasure, which has been lost with the sands of time.** After finding an ancient map, our hero has stumbled across a gloomy cavern, and it is here that his adventures start.

Taking control of Joe, your first task is to explore this screen-by-screen platform game. It has an air of familiarity about it, being a fairly standard, but well executed, affair. In many ways, it's reminiscent of *Rick Dangerous*. Joe can run and jump, climb ladders and fall a full screen's height, providing that he doesn't land on anything sharp or otherwise perilous. There are traps on some screens, activated by walking over or passing by them, but these are reset by leaving and re-entering the screen, and there are the obligatory patrolling nasties, which are removed from play if Joe comes into contact with them. This will cause loss of life though, so care should always be taken when entering a new part of the game.

The main object is to collect the treasure, and there are also objects to find that will help you to progress. One essential item is the torch – without it, a certain part of the game is in complete darkness, and no further progress can be made.

Graphically, there's some nice use of available colour palette, and the sprites are well animated. Special mention must go to the title and interlude music, as it's something of a highlight, with the latter in particular having a hint of drama and seriousness about it. In-game, sound effects are functional but nothing special, and the game engine is solid and unoriginal, and occasionally, collision detection can be a little unfair. In summary: a solid and unoriginal production, just like its name.

RATING **68%**



» *Joe's Adventure* is a decent effort, but we can't say that we're too impressed with the sloppy collision detection



» *Slim Jim* is certainly cute, but he's not a patch on good old *Wizball*

NAKED MERMAIDS? YES PLEASE...

THE ADVENTURES OF JIM SLIM IN DRAGONLAND

- » **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64/128 (DISK ONLY)
- » **RELEASE DATE:** EARLY 2006
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** ARGUS
- » **DESIGNS PUBLISHER:** PROTOVISION
- » **PRICE:** TBC
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DAVE JOHNSTONE

***J**im Slim* **is the latest addition to Protovision's ever-growing library.** This was started some years ago, but never officially released, until now. On loading, it tells of a wicked (in the medieval sense of the word) demon known as Gothar, ruler of the Darklands. Stuck in the middle of his realm is a peaceful kingdom called Blazlind, which had as its protector a mysterious and magic Skull, keeper of the native Blizzies. Well, guess what? The Skull was stolen, and with all but one of the Blizzies has fled. Worse still, Jim Slim's dearest, Candy, has been kidnapped in all of the commotion.

Thus starts an incredibly cute platformer, or so it would seem. *Jim Slim* is limited in the way that he moves. He may only do so one 'block' at a time left or right, and only jump one block high. There is an additional move in which he may jump one block high and two left or right, and move left or right as he falls. To further help, there are strategically placed trampolines. This control system takes a little getting use to but makes for a slower and thoughtful pace of play, and adds a puzzle angle, as each level as they may only be completed in a few ways. The designs of each level is progressively more difficult at about the right rate, though some mischievously lead you the wrong way. It can often be a case of trial and error, and with limited movements, there's nothing that can't be completed without practice or logic. Later levels introduce transporters, tube systems and additional firepower.

The star of the show is the graphics: bright, colourful, superbly animated and extremely cute. To emphasise its cuteness, the accompanying music is bubbly and bouncy, and the presentation is slick and welcoming. There's also a handy password system, as each world is split into three levels with 15 worlds to play through.

There are many better-looking games to be had, but aesthetics aren't everything, as we know. This is a very worthy addition to your collection though, with some nice and well-implemented ideas, and above all, it's fun to play too.

RATING **75%**



BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF ALL THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to also have a rough idea of how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is a *Retro Gamer* buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items can often be found cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher, make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

***Retro Gamer* will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or is interesting or quirky) you'll find it here. This month we've been amazed by the bids for *Bubbler* on the Spectrum and Nintendo's *Majora's Mask*.**

It's a well known fact that Rare's early 8-bit titles can sell for a fair amount of cash whenever they're put up for auction (after all, most of those boxes look bloody amazing), but even we were gob-smacked when we came across a recent copy of *Bubbler* that we were hoping to add to our already sizeable Retro Gamer collection.

Rare's last ever Spectrum game ended up selling for an astonishingly high £175, and immediately sparked much controversy on various Spectrum forums (mainly due to the seller's claim that it's the rarest game on the Spectrum). Still, with a rumoured print run of just 3,500, it's hardly surprising that two eBayers in particular got themselves into a frantic bidding war (the winner, pdw21uk ended up purchasing the coveted title by bidding an extra five pounds more than his rival). gargoyle1967 had the last laugh though, as the lucky sod managed to pick up a copy just three days later for £67.



Left: £175 for this? You are having a laugh!

3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45 - £60**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £35**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (with games)**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.
- VIRUS (STRIPPED DOWN VERSION OF ZARCH)



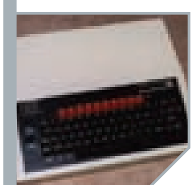
ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

An classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £25**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £25**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50-£70**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ (with games)**

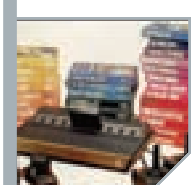
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £30**

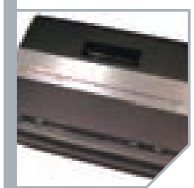
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

ROCKING HORSE SHIT
HEN'S TEETH
LUCKY FIND
EBAY REGULAR
CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £40**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



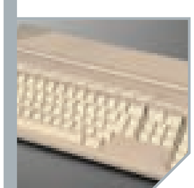
JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's Tempest!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD



LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75 (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £500+**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high prce means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



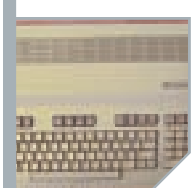
C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 - £30**
The less-well known siblings of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Aprox. £30**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £50**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

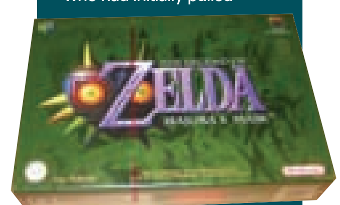


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

Granted, £67 is still a high price to pay for *Bubbler* (it normally sells for between £30 and £50), but it's certainly a lot easier on the wallet than £175.

As is normally the case with high selling eBay items, several other copies have now mysteriously appeared, with one currently sporting a 'buy it now' price of £200 (amusingly, the owner still expects you to pay postage costs). It would appear that *Bubble* holds the same niche in the Spectrum market that *Radiant Silvergun* has managed to achieve on the Saturn; it's their desirability, rather than their actual true rareness that constantly pushes the price up.

However, that wasn't the only game recently to sell for silly money, as Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* has also been turning a few heads. On the 29th of October (incidentally, the same day that the £175 *Bubbler* auction finished) a factory sealed copy of the classic N64 title sold for a mind-numbingly high £255. Three eBayers, saffyslover, twilightprincess3 and black-market-games were all competing for it, and it was looking like saffyslover was going to walk away with the desirable spoils. The eventual winner, however, was Black-market-games, who had initially pulled out when his bid of £45 was beaten. Unperturbed, he swooped in at the last moment with his amazingly high final bid.



Left: Always look for the official Nintendo logo on the tear strip (as illustrated).

As with *Bubbler*, several other sealed copies immediately began to appear on eBay, all sporting inflated 'buy it now' prices. As Retro Gamer was going to press, two sealed copies were on sale for the somewhat ridiculous price of £200, while a third copy was currently at £21 with four days to the auction's end. Interestingly, many of the copies that have started to appear after the £255 bid seem to lack the actual official Nintendo logo on the tear strip, so there is some question as to their authenticity. As such, we would advise that you avoid anything that looks suspect.

mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30 depending on condition/extras**
The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+**
Powerful early 90s home computers by Fujitsu, which could read CDs.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
–Tesco Value Baked Beans
– McVitiés Ginger Nuts
– Ribena 500ml



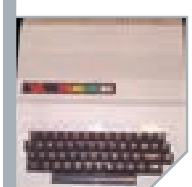
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**
More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out…Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



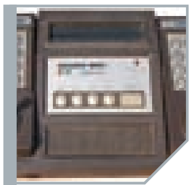
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 standalone**
Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early 1980s boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Failed console by Emmerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT ATTACK



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



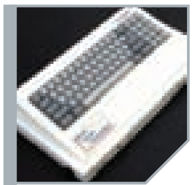
INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 upwards depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 depending on condition/model**
Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 (allegedly for a mint complete system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



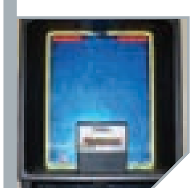
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisngly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.
- ALIEN
- HONEY BEE
- POLICE BUST



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 upwards**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

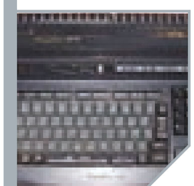
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £50**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

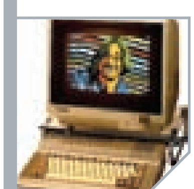


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £50**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £90**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10-£50 depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of very cool Japanese games for it. Released in the USA as the NEC Trek. While fairly cheap, be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has surprisingly a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 depending on extras**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (can be found quite cheap)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



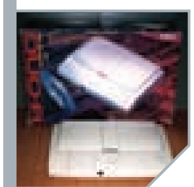
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 upwards**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout..



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

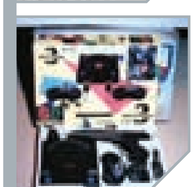
NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

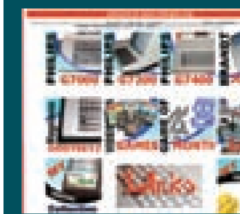


FAMICLONE
» YEAR **N/A**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Mass produced pirate versions of the Famicom system. Virtually infinite different designs.
- CRISIS FORCE
- SWEET HOME
- HAUNG DI



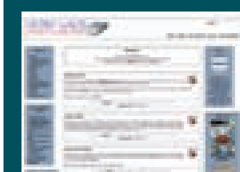
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES



PHILIPS G7000 VIDEOPAC
The world's best Videopac support site is there for you to browse, join and enjoy at: **www.videopac.org**

SNESLAND.COM
SNES website featuring over 600 games, top 25 games, forums and more. Go to: **www.snesland.com**



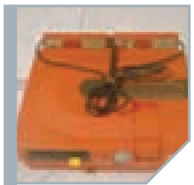
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SHARP FAMICOM TWIN

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**

Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp. Comes in two colours, black and pink.

- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH

» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1 - £200**

Series of small handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**

Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8**

A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.

- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12**

Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.

- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE

» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**

No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.

- IKARUGA
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



N64

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the Playstation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like Donkey Kong) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.

- SIN & PUNISHMENT
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD

» YEAR **1999**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards!**

Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.

- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**

Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.

- VICE: PROJECT DOOM
- SNAKE'S REVENGE
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.

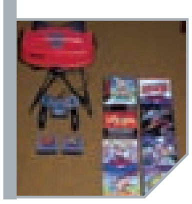


SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £100**

Cheaper and redesigned SNES.

- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**

Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches.

- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



CD-I 205/210/220

» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with Digital Video Card)**

Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.

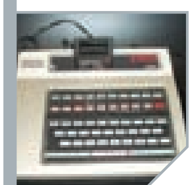


CD-I 450/490/740

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (more with DVC)**

Consolised version of previous models, requires a different '9956' DVC.

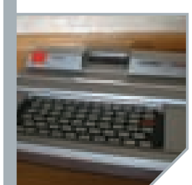
- THE APPRENTICE
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.

- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



32X

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (must have RF + Mains)**

Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance the it's capabilities.

- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 depending on extras**

Sega's final hardware release.



GAME GEAR

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 more with extras**

Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).

- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50**

Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £50**

Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 with leads etc.**

Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.

- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- NINJA GAIDEN



AMSTRAD MEGA PC

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10.50 (according to eBay)**

A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE

» YEAR **1991**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £100**

Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II

» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 depending on model**

The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**

Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.

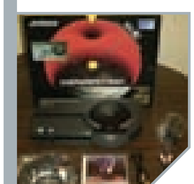


NOMAD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**

Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ depending on system**

CDX/Xeye

A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 depending on system**

Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games .

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with games)**

Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



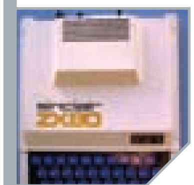
SATURN

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**

Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR



ZX-80

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 Apparently if boxed and mint**

Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81

» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £70 if mint**

Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



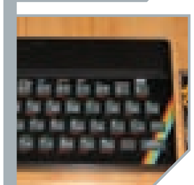
ZX SPECTRUM 48K

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**



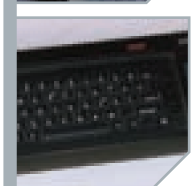
ZX SPECTRUM

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



ZX SPECTRUM +2

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



ZX SPECTRUM +3

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**

The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many play ground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

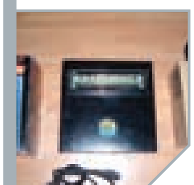
SNK



NEOGEO AES

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards**

High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, due to the high price of the original games, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx. £70 (multi-slot systems cost more)**

High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS ##
- WAKU WAKU 7



NEOGEO CD

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 varies**

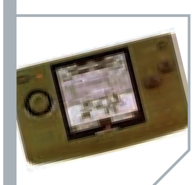


NEOGEO CDZ

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 varies**

CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**

Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed in competing against the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO MART

Looking for that elusive piece of retro goodness? Got an attic full of forgotten treasures that you now want to sell? Luckily for you, Retro Mart is here to help. For the safety of our readers, please send all enquiries to our email address: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we will then put you in touch with the relevant buyer/seller.

ATARI FOR SALE

Atari Lynx and games – I have an Atari Lynx (the newer version) with several games for sale. California Games, Rampage and Chip's Challenge are included, but don't have their original boxes or instructions. £35

SEGA FOR SALE

Sega Nomad unboxed – Please note I have a Sega Nomad, which I am selling for a bargain £25. The machine itself no longer seems to work and the screen has a big crack in it. Would be handy for spare parts.

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM AND 17 GAMES

Sega Master System and 17 games – This is a boxed Sega Master system (old style model) and features 17 amazing titles (all are boxed with instructions). Games include Wonder Boy, Afterburner, Out Run, Mickey Mouse: Castle of Illusion and Rastan. £100 O.N.O.

SEGA WANTED

Looking for Mega CD games – Hi there, I'm after Pal versions of Shining Force CD, Night Trap and Final Fight CD for the Mega CD. Get in touch with me for sensible offers to consider.

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

Looking for a pristine copy of Panzer Dragoon Saga on the Pal Sega Saturn. It must have the original outer sleeve and the discs must be flawless. Will pay £70

NINTENDO FOR SALE

Pal SNES with two controllers and seven unboxed games - Games include A Link to the Past, Super Mario World, Ivan Stewart's Off Road Racer and Busby the Bob Cat. £25 plus £12 P&P

ORIGINAL GAME BOY WITH TWO GAMES

I have an unboxed Nintendo Game Boy for sale, with two cartridges, Tetris and Super Mario Land 2. Yours for just £20 (+£5 P&P)

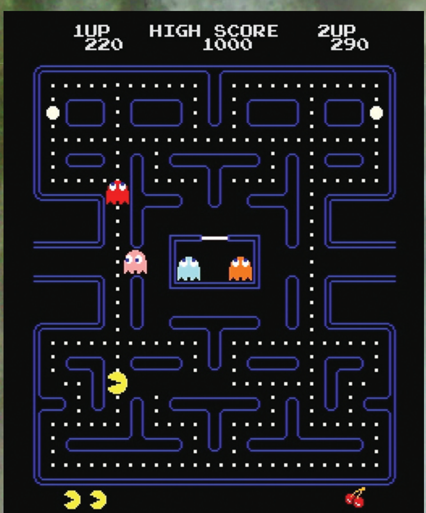




DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME

Developer Look-Back: With the recent releases of *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Kameo: Elements of Power*, *Retro Gamer* felt it was high time to re-visit one of the UK's most prominent developers





NEO GEO POCKET

Retroinspection: The highly underrated Neo Geo Pocket gets fully exposed in next month's *Retro Gamer*

GP2X

Retro Rated: We've finally got our sweaty mitts on the GP2X to discover all its juicy secrets next month

GAME BOY MICRO RETRO

Emulation Nation: The Game Boy Micro may be the newest handheld around, but it still has plenty of retro connections…



THE EVOLUTION OF PAC-MAN

Thought you knew everything about Namco's legendary pill-popper? Stuart Campbell would beg to differ



TECHNOS

Company Profile: John Anderson reveals that there was so much more to Technos than just its *Double Dragon* franchise



STEVE ROBINSON

In the chair with… *Retro Gamer* sits down with Steve Robertson, one of the most talented loading screen artists the C64 ever saw

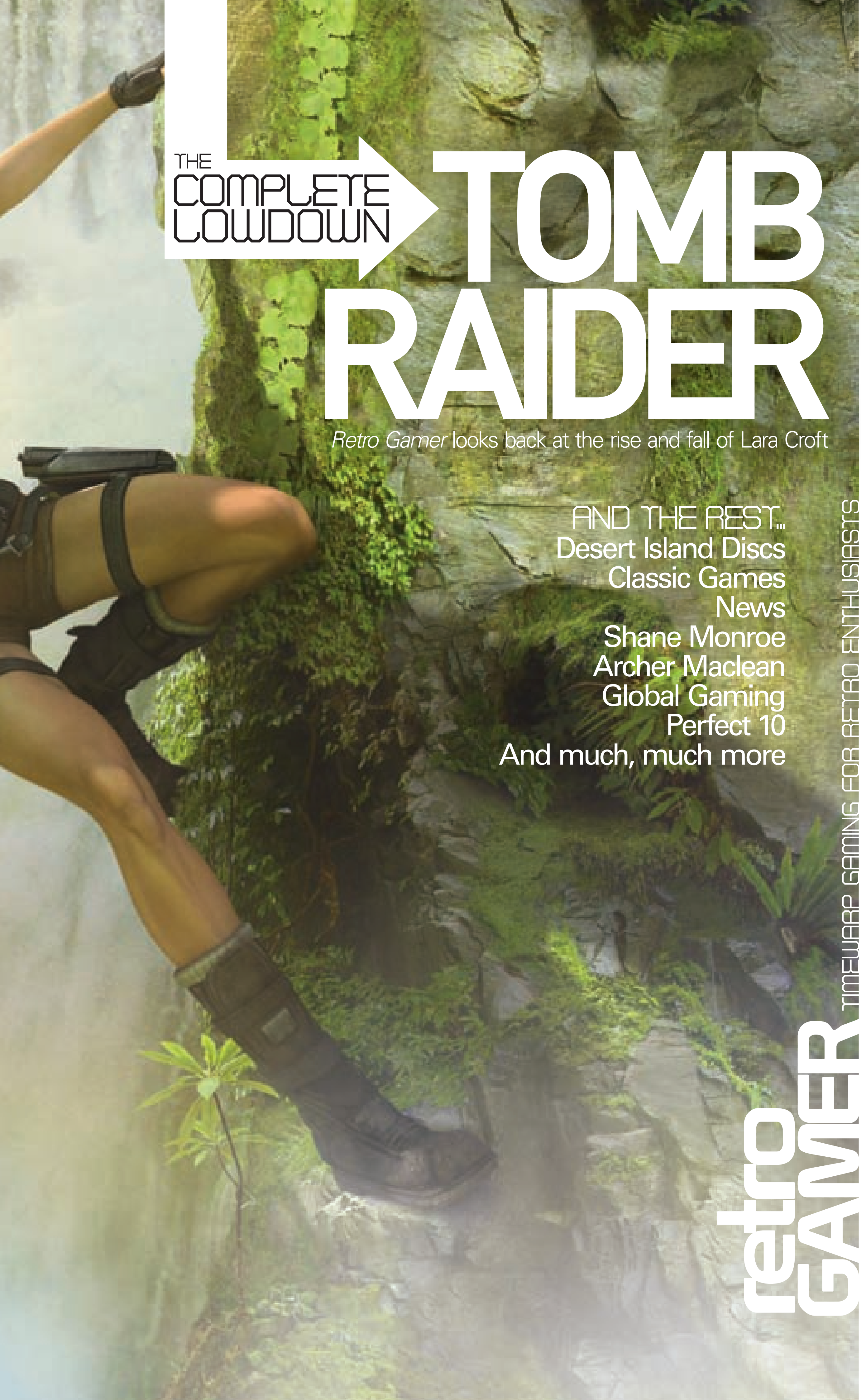
NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 5 JAN 2006

retro GAMER

LOAD 20

TIMEWARP GAMING FOR RETRO ENTHUSIASTS



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

TOMB RAIDER

Retro Gamer looks back at the rise and fall of Lara Croft

AND THE REST…

Desert Island Discs
Classic Games
News
Shane Monroe
Archer Maclean
Global Gaming
Perfect 10
And much, much more



PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

After facing off against all manner of brutal beasts, the two heroes of Prehistoric Isle finally face the most dangerous dinosaur of all: the dreaded Tyrannosaurus Rex…











SCREEN 1
Your biplanes may have made short work of the many critters that populated the earlier levels of the superb *Prehistoric Isle*, but it wasn't until you finally went up against the t-rex – or more precisely, just his head – that you realised just how tough these dinos were.

SCREEN 2
Finally, after what seemed like a tenner's worth of 10 pences pieces, the monstrous t-rex succumbed to your firepower (and your rapidly tiring trigger finger). Exploding as only an arcade dinosaur could, the two biplanes flew to the safety of a nearby plane.

SCREEN 3
With both pilots safely on board, they explain how the mysterious island is overrun with dinosaurs and that they have managed to escape its dreaded confines. Breathing a long sigh of relief the two heroes gaze into the distance. A job well done.

SCREEN 4
But then disaster strikes! From out of nowhere, a horde of Pterodactyls starts harassing the escaping plane. The flock causes so much damage that the plane eventually explodes, killing both pilots and everyone on board. Don't you just love happy endings?

SCREEN 5
With no survivors to speak of, intelligence soon makes a note of the dangerous terrain, and as the closing credits begin to appear the Prehistoric Isle is revealed to be part of the mysterious Bermuda Triangle. If only somebody had told us at the beginning…